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King Hussein, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10



Mubarak warns against 'a new era of violence'

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak warned yesterday that Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in East Jerusalem could derail the peace process and plunge the region into a new era of violence, reports **Nevine Khalil**.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Belgian Foreign Minister Eric Derycke, Mubarak accused Israel of pursuing policies based on "the arrogance of power... which can never lead to a solution."

He continued: "The question of Jerusalem will not be solved by the use of bulldozers. Bulldozers will only complicate problems and aggravate grudges and could lead to events which we will wish had never happened."

He said Israel had decided to go ahead with the construction scheme "in defiance of the entire world community, which is a matter of the utmost gravity... I believe the consequences might lead to instability in the region, which is bound to affect Europe and other parts of the world... The construction of this settlement not only threatens the negotiations, but could signal the beginning of a new era of violence — a matter which we wish to avoid."

Mubarak said construction in Jerusalem violated the Oslo Accords, which provide for the future of the holy city to be determined in the final status negotiations. "This means that the status quo in Jerusalem should not be changed... Jerusalem is occupied territory," he said.

Asked about the PLO's attempt to obtain an anti-Israel resolution from the UN Security Council, Mubarak replied: "What is happening in Jerusalem is one of the gravest situations in the peace process and I fear that it could threaten the process in its entirety... I hope the United States will not use its veto power because this would run against world public opinion. The least it could do is to abstain, because America is the principal sponsor of the peace process."

Answering another question, Mubarak said the peace process "is facing its most difficult phase since it began in 1977. The process had never reached such an impasse in the past... Unless the signed agreements are respected, the situation will be very grave indeed and could lead to further complications."

Arabs and Muslims will give vent to their feelings at a forthcoming Islamic conference in Islamabad, Mubarak said, adding, "Religion is a very sensitive matter and religious sites should not be touched at all."

A reporter asked Mubarak whether his telephone conversations during the past few days with Jordan's King Hussein, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu meant that there had been discussions of options to contain the situation. "There is nothing at all on the horizon," Mubarak responded.

He said he had received a telephone call from King Hussein while the monarch was on a visit to Israel. The king informed Mubarak that he had had talks with Netanyahu, who affirmed his readiness to reach a solution. "But I've heard this before and it was never followed by real, positive action," Mubarak said. "What happened was the opposite."

Giant plan

PRIME Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri said yesterday he presented President Hosni Mubarak with a document entitled "Egypt in the 21st century," outlining plans to "build a new civilisation with all its components" in the coming decades. The document, Ganzouri added, will be made available to all those who are interested in the subject.

Previous reports said the document focused on an ambitious government scheme to establish new agricultural and industrial communities in the Western Desert. Ganzouri said he also presented Mubarak with a draft law on "investment guarantees and incentives."

Israel away

PRIME Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri opened yesterday Cairo's 30th international trade fair in which a record 1,000 foreign companies from 51 countries as well as 1,200 Egyptian firms are taking part. Israel stayed away this year and Iraq sent a purchasing committee to shop for medicine and foodstuff under its food-for-oil deal with the United Nations. This was Iraq's first presence at the fair since the 1991 Gulf War.

Ganzouri, who made a three-hour tour of the exhibition, was upbeat about the record number of participants, declaring it showed that the nations of the world sought to have an economic presence in this country.

Kabariti out

KING Hussein of Jordan yesterday replaced Prime Minister Abdul-Karim-Kabariti, 47, with the former veteran premier Abdul-Salam Al-Majali, 71, who signed Jordan's peace treaty with Israel.

Kabariti, who was prime minister for just over a year, resigned from government claiming Jordan needed a new start and a new team to further economic reforms and enhance Jordan's role in the Arab and regional spheres.

Kabariti was reported by Reuters to be unhappy at the king's decision to meet the Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, just a week after having rebuked him for pushing the peace process towards an abyss of bloodshed.

Majali, who as prime minister from 1993 to 1995 oversaw Jordan's first multi-party elections, is expected to lead the government into elections scheduled for November. (see p.4)

INSIDE

Toward the abyss

Israeli bulldozers, which have started clearing the grounds of Jebel Abu Ghneim, may be digging the grave of Middle East peace, writes **Graham Usher** from East Jerusalem

At three o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, bulldozers tore up ground at the foot of Jebel Abu Ghneim, marking Israel's first move in transforming a forested hilltop in occupied East Jerusalem into the site of the Har Homa Jewish settlement. The bulldozers were surrounded by several hundred Israeli soldiers, some in sniper positions. There were few Palestinians.

Prior to the bulldozers' arrival, the army had sealed off nearby villages, preventing all local access to the site. After the ground was broken, the army declared the site, along with Bethlehem and Hebron, as closed military zones and suspended joint patrols with Palestinian police.

The only protest permitted was a five-tent encampment on the other side of Jebel Abu Ghneim. Set up the night before, the camp has served as a base for around 100 Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and as a means "to channel Palestinian anger into non-violent forms," said PLO Jerusalem representative, Faisal Husseini.

News of the bulldozers, however, caused the mood to change. "No one can say what will happen now," said Bethlehem Palestinian Council (PC) member, Salah Tamari. "By this act, Netanyahu has demonstrated his lack of faith in the peace process. It is a recipe for explosion."

In Gaza, Yasser Arafat's immediate response to Israel's "grave mistake" was to call on Palestinians to refrain from violent responses. His problem — and the problem of leaders such as Husseini and Tamari — is that such calls are starting to ring a little hollow.

From the moment the Har Homa crisis erupted, the PLO leader has urged restraint in the belief that international diplomacy, rather than other forms of protest, would curtail Likud's settlement ambitions in Jerusalem. This policy has now proved ineffectual.

Over the last two weeks, Arafat has marshalled massive majorities behind the Palestinian position at the UN Security Council and General Assembly — only to have these majorities sunk by the use of the US veto. Two days earlier, he convened an international meeting in Gaza made up of representatives from the US, Egypt, Jordan, Japan, Norway, the EU and the UN. In a measured speech, he detailed Israel's violations of the Oslo agreements, calling for an international "mechanism" to be set up that could resolve such disputes. The various representatives listened sympathetically and promised to raise Palestinian grievances with their governments.



Several hundred Israeli soldiers seal off the Abu Ghneim area, as the bulldozers begin tearing at the foot of the forested hill *(photo: AFP)*

Netanyahu's response came at a press conference with Jordan's King Hussein on 16 March. "I said the bulldozers would start this week. They will start this week," he said. Two days later, Netanyahu proved true to his word.

The only succour Arafat received for his efforts is a reported "package deal" whereby, in return for his tolerating Har Homa, Israel would expedite progress on outstanding "interim" issues such as opening an airport and seaport in Gaza and establishing a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank. As a gesture — at the press conference with King Hussein — Netanyahu announced that Israel would "permit" Arafat's personal plane to land and take off from Dahaniya airport in Gaza.

Palestinian Authority (PA) officials have reacted to the reported trade offer with scorn. "The problem is not the airport or seaport," said PA spokesman, Marwan Kanafani. "Without addressing Har Homa and redeployment, which led to this situation, the crisis today is the same as the crisis yesterday." This appears to be Arafat's line. At a meeting on Monday with the Palestinian Emergency Committee organising the protests at Jebel Abu Ghneim, the PLO leader said he would not meet with Netanyahu unless the Har Homa decision was addressed.

In the vacuum, Palestinian-Israeli relations have plunged into their worst crisis since the advent of the Oslo process. Alarmed by the PA's apparent rapprochement in recent months with PLO and Islamist rejectionist groups, the Israeli press is full of warnings of imminent armed attacks inside Israel, fears fanned by comments from Hamas' Jordan spokesperson, Ibrahim Ghoshab, that Palestinians should "resume the Intifada" in protest at construction at Jebel Abu Ghneim.

Arafat's remarks suggest he is unlikely to approve, even tacitly, such a response. The sheer scale of Israel's military mobilisation in the Occupied Territories also suggests that any mass protests are likely to be bloody and short-lived. Yet, politically, Arafat cannot afford to be seen quietly surrendering to Netanyahu's dictates.

One possible response — raised by seven PA cabinet ministers — is for the PLO to suspend its participation in the peace process, until and unless Israel addresses the issues of Har Homa and further redeployment. For this to be effective, however, will require something more than for the international community to "share Palestinians' frustration", as expressed by US State Department spokesman, Nicholas Burns. It will require the US to exert real pressure on the Israeli government and for the Arab world to threaten to break diplomatic ties.

Under such conditions, domestic Israeli moves could then be made to replace the existing Likud coalition with a national unity government. This, now, may be the only peaceful way out of a crisis which — in the words of Yasser Arafat — is "galloping toward the abyss." (see p.4)

Supreme Court rejects appeal

PEACE activists and Arab landowners yesterday asked Israel's Supreme Court to halt the construction of a Jewish housing settlement in East Jerusalem, as bulldozers carved up the hillside under heavy security. But the court refused to order the construction to be suspended until it hears claims of discrimination against the Palestinians. The court ordered the government to explain its planning considerations within 60 days.

At first light yesterday, dozens of Israeli troops took up position on the pine-covered slope for a second day following warnings that the work would unleash Palestinian protests. Some 300 Palestinians staged a peaceful protest march in the West Bank town of Ramallah. "Netanyahu, be careful. The Palestinian people will not be humiliated," the marchers chanted. Loyalists of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat kept the crowd away from Israeli army posts to prevent clashes.

Faisal Husseini, the senior Palestinian official in Jerusalem, who had camped on a hill next to the construction site for two days, said protests would continue, but remain peaceful.

In Umm Touba, a Palestinian neighbourhood next to the construction site, residents were bitter. Several villagers had land taken from them for the 6,500-apartment settlement project, AP reported.

"We see our land taken in front of our eyes and we can't do anything," said Ibrahim Abu Teir, 67, the village leader, who was forced to give up seven acres.

In three separate appeals, 29 Palestinian landowners, Israeli peace activists and Israel's opposition Meretz Party turned to the Supreme Court in the hope of winning a temporary halt to the work. However, lawyer Danny Seidemann said chances were slim because he expected that the judges would be reluctant to rule on such a sensitive political matter. The court's initial decision to delay a ruling pending further hearings appeared to support the lawyer's view.

The appeals by the Palestinians argued that city planners only considered the needs of Jerusalem's Jewish population, to the detriment of its Arab residents. Planners "spoke candidly in closed session of the need to thwart Palestinian development in the Har Homa area and to use the planned road grid to cut the Palestinians off from the geographical area surrounding them," one appeal said.

Prime Minister Netanyahu defended his decision, saying that no peace accord justified giving up part of the holy city.

"Our right to build in our capital is not something that can be questioned," Netanyahu told Israel Radio. "I cannot imagine or agree to any idea of peace that will not allow us to build in Jerusalem."

Meanwhile, former prime minister Shimon Peres called the project "a fatal mistake."

According to a survey published yesterday in the *Maariv* newspaper, 48 per cent of respondents opposed the decision to begin construction now, while 40 per cent supported Netanyahu's decision.

Back to the Security Council

THE PLO has called for an immediate meeting of the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution ordering a halt to the Israeli building project in East Jerusalem.

In identical letters to both the Council president and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the PLO's UN observer, Nasser Al-Kidwa, said Israel had "begun the actual work for construction of a new settlement in the Jebel Abu Ghneim area to the south of occupied East Jerusalem."

"The Israeli occupying authorities closed off the area, declaring it a military zone, and sent in bulldozers to start the work," he wrote. "We call upon the Security Council to convene an immediate, official meeting to consider this serious situation, and to adopt a resolution in this regard, clearly demanding the immediate and full cessation of all settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim, East Jerusalem and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. We believe that it is the duty of the Council to act and to act rapidly in response to such grave developments."

The 185-member General Assembly adopted a resolution by an overwhelming majority last Thursday calling on Israel to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which alter the facts on the ground. This followed the vetoing by the US on 7 March of a similar resolution in the Security Council.

A UN spokesman said Secretary-General Annan had "learned with disappointment and deep concern that, despite international appeals," the Israeli authorities had decided to proceed with the construction work.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright criticised Israel for going ahead with the controversial housing project. "I think that the Israelis understand the difficulties that we see with their going forward," she said. She recalled that President Bill Clinton had publicly stated that he wished Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had decided against the project.

Asked about a possible violent Palestinian backlash, Albright said: "We are obviously concerned about the fact that violence is never an answer to the problems in the Middle East. We would very much want to see a return to the [negotiating] table. That is the only time that there has been progress in the Middle East...when the parties are actually talking to each other at the table. And that is the way we would like to see things proceed."

In Paris, Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette warned against a resurgence of violence. "This decision is an obstacle to peace," de Charette told reporters. "I hope that violence will not start again in this part of the Middle East and I can only suggest to both sides to do all they can to avoid it."

De Charette said France felt the Israeli decision "goes against the spirit and the letter of the Oslo Accords as well as other accords between the Israelis and Palestinians."

China condemned the Israeli construction scheme, warning that it would inevitably derail the peace process.

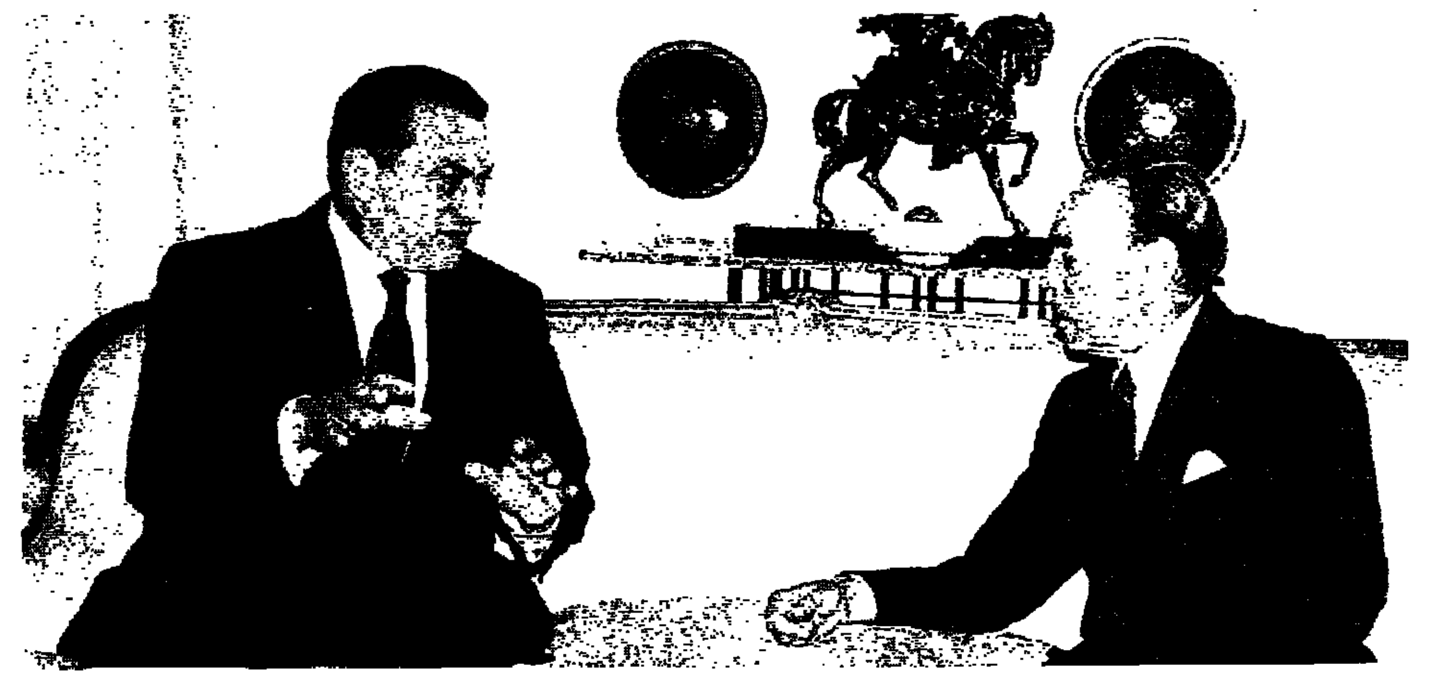
Jordan also urged Israel to stop the construction work, to prevent a breakdown in the peace talks. "We regard settlements as a violation of international law and the agreement signed between Israelis and the Palestinians," Information Minister Marwan Muasher told reporters.

The radical Palestinian movement Islamic Jihad called on Palestinians to do "everything possible" to stop construction.

"Take part in the jihad, do everything possible, place your bodies in front of the bulldozers which are destroying the bones of our ancestors," the group said in a statement released in Damascus. "We have nothing to lose but our blood and our lives..."

Arabs take 'quiet' steps on Jerusalem

Following his return from visits to France, the United States and Morocco, President Mubarak is intensifying contacts with leaders in the region in an attempt to salvage the peace process, reports Nevine Khalil



On his way back from his week-long visit to the United States last Friday, President Hosni Mubarak stopped over in Rabat to discuss the volatile situation in East Jerusalem with Morocco's King Hassan.

Mubarak and Hassan, who chairs a special Organisation of the Islamic Conference committee on Jerusalem, called for a ministerial meeting of this committee, which will be attended by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, on 27 March.

Speaking to reporters aboard the presidential plane on his return flight to Cairo on Saturday, Mubarak said that Hassan's position on the Har Homa settlement was identical to Egypt's.

Israel's settlement plan contradicts the spirit of the Oslo Accords and the other agreements between the Israelis and Palestinians, he added.

Arab countries are united in their position on the issues of Jerusalem and settlement expansion, Mubarak said.

Following the talks with Mubarak, Hassan also confirmed that Morocco held the same position as other Arab countries. "Everyone who proclaims that God is one and that Mohamed is His Prophet has a right and a duty on the question of Jerusalem," he said.

Mubarak rejected the US argument that it vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Har Homa settlement because the Council was not a forum for negotiations. "The United Nations and the Security Council were created to solve problems and marginalising this world organisation would mean its dissolution," he said.

But, Mubarak said, despite the complications in the peace process, an Arab summit will take place only when the need arises. "What is important now is to hold consultations among the Arab leaders," he said. He reiterated the view that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks are inseparable, and that reactivating them would require confidence-building between the parties.

Syria will not return to the negotiating table "unless there is a clear indication that it will regain its land," Mubarak said in an interview with the television programme *Good Morning Egypt* on Sunday. He added that the US is looking for a formula acceptable to both the Syrians and Israelis that would include the return of all occupied Syrian territory. "Steps are quietly being taken by the Arabs concerning Jerusalem," he added, but he did not disclose the nature of these steps.

Asked about his stopover in Paris on the way to the US, Mubarak described his relationship with French President Jacques Chirac as "very good", adding that France and the rest of Europe want a just and lasting peace in the region.

Mubarak rejected charges that Egypt had hindered an agreement on the West Bank town of Hebron earlier in the year, saying that when there are complications in negotiations, "Israel looks for a scapegoat". He added that Egypt had no interest in discouraging the Palestinians, and that such claims were made to pressure Cairo into persuading the Palestinians to accept what the Israelis offered at the time.

Mubarak also rejected complaints about anti-Israeli sentiment in the Egyptian press. He recalled that during one of his Washington meetings, he was presented with a booklet containing anti-Israel cartoons published by Cairo newspapers. "I surprised them by producing a similar booklet containing clippings from the Israeli press attacking Egypt and myself," Mubarak said. "They couldn't reply."

In Congress, Mubarak added, he was confronted with the accusation that he was anti-Semitic, "but I reminded them that we are Semitic too".

Mubarak stressed that he has no authority over the press, including newspapers which are described as semi-official or government-controlled, such as *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Gomhuria*. "They imagine we can stop a newspaper printing what it wants but the minister of information does not have the right to take out any article because the press has complete freedom and represents all trends," he said.

Copenhagen goes to Jerusalem

Seven Egyptian intellectuals are travelling to Israel to team up with Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis in launching a peace alliance. Nevine Khalil reports

Intellectuals and public figures from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Israel are planning a demonstration in East Jerusalem on Friday, protesting Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories. The demonstration is part of a two-day agenda for launching the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace (IAAIP). Most of those attending are the same figures who formed the Alliance at the end of January because they were alarmed by the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. They also signed the so-called Copenhagen Declaration which outlined their views on the just foundations of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

At the time, nine Egyptian signatories of the Declaration were accused of betraying their compatriots by sitting down with Israelis and assuming the role of negotiator. But the signatories argue that they acted as individuals and are convinced that they can win over mainstream Israeli public opinion to their position.

According to political analyst Lutfi El-Kholi, one of the Egyptian signatories, the Alliance aims to initiate a movement opposing Israel's negative policies towards the peace process. El-Kholi will be travelling to Israel tomorrow, along with six other Egyptians.

The packed agenda of the two-day trip "aims to condemn all actions taken by the Israeli government which show that it does not respect signed agreements and the principles of the peace process, as outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration," El-Kholi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. These actions include the building of the Jewish quarter of Har Homa on Palestinian land in Jebel Abu Ghneim, on the outskirts of Bethlehem, the Israeli government's decision — which it later retracted — to shut down four Palestinian offices in Jerusalem and the "pathetic" redeployment in Hebron, he said.

Almost all signatories of the Copenhagen Declaration — members of Israel's Peace Now movement, Knesset members, Palestinians from across the political spectrum including National Authority officials as well as Hamas members, Jordanians and Egyptians — are expected to attend.

In addition to the East Jerusalem march, the agenda includes meetings with Israeli citizens and talks with the Palestinian National Authority — a display of support for the Palestinians' position. No meetings are scheduled with representatives of the Israeli government.

The participating Egyptians include Salah Montasser, a prominent columnist with *Al-Ahram*. Although Montasser is not a signatory of the Copenhagen Declaration, he will take part in the Alliance's activities in the Occupied Territories because he shares its objectives. "I oppose Israel's settlement policy and want to express my support for the Palestinians," he said.

Montasser, who has travelled to Israel in the past, believes that writers and intellectuals have a role to play in peace-making. Both sides of the Copenhagen controversy have a point, he argued, so "I shouldn't refuse everything or accept everything."

"We are all patriots who want to help in achieving peace," Montasser said, adding that his commitment to the Alliance was not binding. "I will continue to choose the positive position which serves the Palestinian cause, whichever side presents it."

The East Jerusalem march has been organised by the Alliance in coordination with resident Palestinians who are already active in opposing Israel's construction plans, he said.

Hala Mustafa, a researcher with the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said that if the Alliance's activities in Israel are successful, "it will give credit and legitimacy to the movement." Mustafa was invited to Copenhagen but did not attend "because I did not feel as an academic that it is my role to get involved in politics." However, she was one of nine intellectuals who took part in an unprecedented meeting with Netanyahu two weeks ago in Cairo.

Mustafa does not object to the Alliance in principle. In fact she believes it could be effective, "because at the core it is concerned with political action, not just rhetoric," a fact demonstrated by the activities it has planned for the next two days. But she argued that the success of the Alliance will depend "on the rate of actual changes on the ground their efforts will bring about." If the protests pressure Netanyahu into changing his settlement policy, "it would be a brilliant start, although much more would be needed to convince public opinion back home of their agenda."

But opposition and distrust remain in some intellectual circles. Saad Wahba, who heads the Arab Artists Union and one of the most vociferous critics of the Copenhagen initiative, was uncertain that the Alliance would achieve much by going to Israel. "These are bubbles in political life," Wahba said. "I doubt they will achieve much."

Although there are continuous demonstrations in Har Homa by movements like Peace Now and others, Wahba argued that "in the end, Israeli society is in agreement with Netanyahu's policies." Like Mustafa, Wahba believes that credit will be given to the Alliance only if it causes a change in Israel's settlement policy. He described this possibility as "very remote, because the Israeli government and most sectors of Israeli society do not even recognise the Copenhagen movement."

Tenant shop-keepers face eviction

The Supreme Constitutional Court surprised the nation and spurred the government into action by quashing a 1977 law sanctioning the continuation of leases on commercial premises following the death of their original tenants. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The government is planning to submit a new draft law to the People's Assembly next week regulating the landlord-tenant relationship for units leased for non-residential purposes. The government went into action after the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that Law 49 of 1977 was unconstitutional because it sanctioned the continuation of rent contracts after the death of the original tenants for premises leased for commercial and trade activities (i.e. shops and offices).

Counsellor Awad El-Morr, the court's chairman, said he had quashed the 1977 law because it discriminated against landlords. In past legislation on landlord-tenant relationships, "tenants were usually projected as weak and vulnerable and landlords as exploiting aggressors," he said. "This unreasonable discrimination resulted in an unbalanced landlord-tenant relationship... although the law should accord the two parties equal rights. Landlords should not be treated as second-class citizens and tenants should not be viewed as citizens of higher standing, with greater rights."

According to El-Morr, the Constitutional Court was primarily concerned to state in clear-cut terms that "what is right for tenants should be equally right for landlords. Rights should be equally divided between tenants and landlords. A law that infringes on the balance between rights and duties should be declared unconstitutional."

The 1977 law discriminated against landlords because the lease contract was open-ended, giving tenants and their heirs the right to use the unit in perpetuity, and in any way they desire, El-Morr said. The law did not include the proviso that the inheritor should be involved in the same kind of activity as that of the original tenant and did not restrict the circle of inheritors to first and/or second degree relatives of the original tenant.

El-Morr said the Court's ruling did not apply to units leased for professional purposes, such as doctors' clinics and lawyers' offices, nor to units leased for industrial activities, "simply because nobody has come forward to contest the legislative texts governing those activities."

The government responded to the Court's decision by announcing that it was preparing a new law to redress the balance in the landlord-tenant relationship in the cases of all units leased for non-residential purposes. According to Talaat Hammad, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, the new law provides for the continuity of the lease contract, following the death of the original tenant, provided that the inheritor is from the first or second degree of kinship, and that the inheritor is carrying out the same activity as the original tenant. In addition to immediately raising the rental value of all units leased for non-residential purposes, the law provides for annual rent increases according to various ratios until the expiry of the lease.

A rival draft will also be submitted to the Assembly by the chairman of its constitutional committee, Mohamed Moussa. This draft provides a time frame of 10 years for the non-residential lease contract, whether it is held by the original tenant or first-degree inheritors, provided they are involved in the same type of activity. The draft also provides for rent increases.

In addition to causing anxiety to shop owners, the decision of the Supreme Constitutional Court has also triggered a controversy in legal circles about its impact on social stability.

Ibrahim El-Nimiki, deputy chairman of the Assembly's Constitutional Committee, heaped praise on the court's decision. "This ruling should be welcomed in all circles because it is the Constitutional Court's job to redress any injustice inflicted on the people. The 1977 law is clearly discriminatory against landlords. It was an extension of a series of laws passed during the 1960s that gave the state the right to intervene in the market and fix and reduce rental values," El-Nimiki said.

Most landlord-tenant relationship laws passed in the 1960s and early '70s discriminated against landlords, he added. "But this is no longer viable since the government has decided to switch to a market-oriented economy."

El-Nimiki praised the government for its quick response. "It was important for the government to act quickly to amend the law, not only in response to the court's decision, but also to offset any negative effects that the unconstitutional law might have," he said.

However, he cautioned that the court's decision should not be used by landlords to arbitrarily evict tenants. The government's draft law was important, he said, "to deal with any social instability that may be caused by the court's decision."

Kamal Khaled, a lawyer and former member of parliament, said the court's decision provided proof that many laws passed by the People's Assembly during the last few years are unconstitutional, "because most of them are submitted and approved at skyrocket speed."

Khaled also warned that although there is a pressing need to liberalise the landlord-tenant relationship, the new laws should not adversely affect the interests of tenants. He claimed that five million tenants could face the threat of eviction from their shops as a result of the court's decision. The new law, therefore, should provide for the continuity of the lease contract provided the inheritors carry out the same type of activity as the original tenant, he argued. This, he believed, would secure social stability. He also expressed confidence that tenants would not object to a rent increase.

Samir Tanaghu, a professor of civil law at Alexandria University, objected to the court's decision. He said the court's opposition to the continuity of the lease contract following the death of the original tenant was invalid because landlords only cared about the rental value, and not who leased the unit. Moreover, he said, the court's ruling went against Article 601 of the Civil Code which states that a contract is not terminated in case of the death of the tenant or landlord.

Mohamed Bayoumi, a hairdresser in downtown Cairo, said he was shocked by the court's decision. While it was true that the 1977 law barred landlords from raising the rental value, he said, "it is also true that the court's ruling gave landlords the green light to evict tenants."

Bayoumi said that he used to pay a monthly rent of LE6 for his premises, "but 10 years ago I reached a friendly agreement with the landlord to raise the rent to LE30 because prices are soaring all the time." According to Bayoumi, tenants are not worried by the prospect of rent increases but by the threat of eviction.

Lions clean-up under fire

The use of sulphuric acid to clean the bronze lions on Qasr El-Nil bridge has drawn fire from two renowned sculptors. Reem Leila reports

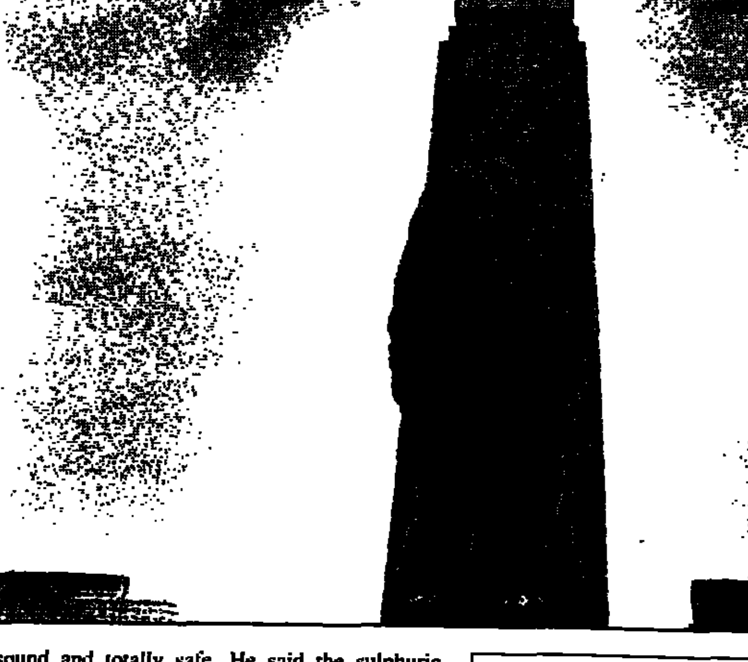


photo: Randa Shaath

The bronze statues of Cairo are getting a face-lift. A long-awaited cleaning project has finally been launched, beginning with the four lions that guard both sides of Qasr El-Nil bridge. The project took years of planning by professors at the faculties of applied arts and antiquities. However, as soon as work began, it came under fire on the grounds that sulphuric acid is being used in the cleaning process.

"What is happening to the statues is a disaster," said Mahmoud Khalil, a renowned sculptor. "Sulphuric acid should not be used to remove pollutants from statues made of bronze or copper. Other dissolvers such as thinner should be employed. Those who are supervising the project are not experts on bronze or copper."

Mohamed Rizk, another well known sculptor, was of the same opinion. "Sulphuric acid, even if it is diluted, is very harmful to the statues. The pollutants should be removed with thinner, which is the only material that does not interreact with the patina [green] layer or the bronze of the statue," Rizk said.

Once the statues are cleaned with thinner, they should be covered with epoxy, he said. He recommended that cleaning should be carried out annually.

The cleaning work on two of the four lions of Qasr El-Nil Bridge began two weeks ago and will be completed in three months.

In the first phase, soft brushes of various sizes, dipped in thinner, are used to remove a three-millimetre thick layer of paint, rust and dust, which accounts for about 40 per cent of the accumulated pollutants. After the statues are washed with water and soap, they will be covered by cotton immersed in diluted sulphuric acid to remove another layer of rust. Then the statues will be given a fresh coat of transparent paint.

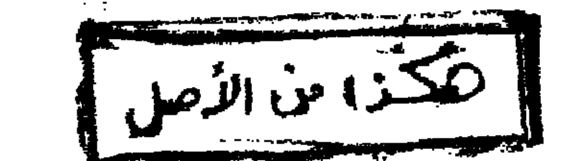
According to Mohamed Zeinhom, a professor at the Faculty of Applied Arts who supervises the project, the cleaning work is scientifically sound and totally safe. He said the sulphuric acid is diluted to three per cent strength, while the internationally accepted standard is 10 per cent. "The pollutants covering the statues will be removed until the reddish colour of the bronze, along with the patina layer covering it, become clear," he said. "One of our main objectives is to preserve the patina layer which is not supposed to cover the entire statue but only parts of it, in order to clarify the details of the sculpture work."

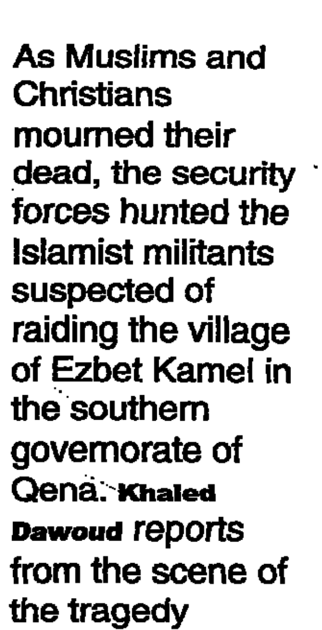
Mahmoud El-Bahgouri, a technician at the Faculty of Applied Arts, also defended the use of sulphuric acid. "I do not know of any other material which can be used for cleaning the statues," he said.

The two lions have now been covered with heavy cloth, preventing pedestrians and motorists from seeing the work in progress. But *Al-Ahram Weekly* was allowed a glimpse of what lay beneath: a reddish statue with small parts covered by the patina layer.

Workers at the site were asked why the statues were covered. The supervising engineer, who declined to mention his name, responded: "We are not covering them out of fear, but we do not want anybody to see them until we are finished. The whole team is working according to a scientific plan. All the chemicals used are not harmful to the statues."

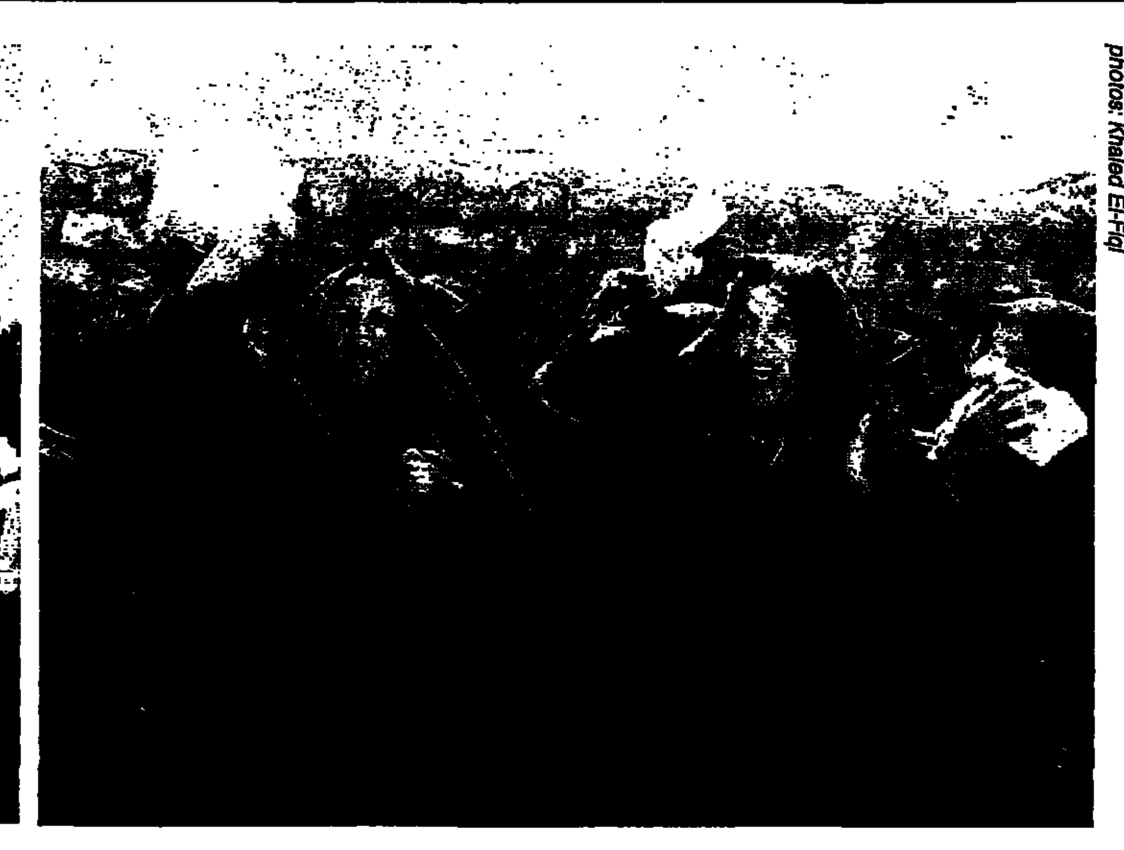
The lions, which were sculpted in France, were brought to Egypt in 1871 during the rule of Khedive Ismail.





As Muslims and Christians mourned their dead, the security forces hunted the Islamist militants suspected of raiding the village of Ezbet Kamel in the southern governorate of Qena. **Khaled Dawoud** reports from the scene of the tragedy





photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

Blood and lentils

The security forces have besieged sugar-cane fields and scoured mountain caves in search of the Islamist militants who opened fire at random last Thursday in the streets of the predominantly-Christian village of Ezbet Kamel in the southern governorate of Qena, killing 13 people. The assailants, who carried automatic rifles and wore police uniforms, are believed to be members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. Nine of those killed were Christian, the other four Muslim. As they escaped after the massacre, the gunmen opened fire at an express train, killing a pregnant Muslim woman.

There were harrowing scenes as the village's residents buried their dead on Saturday. Cries of grief and anguish mingled with Qur'an recitations and Christian prayers as the inhabitants offered their condolences to the victims' families. Spent bullets from the assailants' weapons still littered the narrow streets of the village, and bloodstains remained on the ground — often covered with uncooked, yellow lentils, which the residents believe keep away evil spirits.

Attacking at nightfall last Thursday, the assailants' first victim was Gaber Mohamed, 65. He was shot in the head as he was buying cigarettes from a small shop at the edge of a village. In a tailor's shop next door, Gadallah Mansour, 50, was working with his assistant Makram Gergios, 20. They were also shot in cold blood. Gergios' head slumped onto the sewing machine; Mansour fell behind his work bench.

A few metres away, Fadel Mohamed Eissa, the Muslim owner of a grocery store, sat chatting with four Christian friends at the end of the day, as had been his habit for years. They were all shot dead by bullets in the head and chest. Saleh, Eissa's son, said he saw his father shot, "but all I could do was to run and hide inside the shop." Eissa is survived by his widow and 11 children.

The militants then stalked the village's main street, killing five other men who happened to cross their path. They were two Muslim police guards and three Christian peasants who were on their way home.

The gunmen later opened fire on a passenger train heading from Luxor to Cairo, killing a 36-year-old pregnant woman who was on her way to the capital to give birth at her family's home. Six other passengers were wounded.

Security sources said they believed the militants had intended to target another passenger train carrying foreign tourists from Luxor, which was supposed to arrive at the same time, but was late. The delay may have saved the lives of some of those passengers.

The attack was one of the worst carried out against Copts during the past few years. A month earlier, Islamist militants raided a church in the town of Abu Qurqas in Al-Minya Governorate, killing 12 young men and women who were attending a religious meeting. Around the same time last year, the militants attacked a predominantly-Christian village, Ezbet Al-Aqbat, in the southern governorate of Assiut, killing eight people, including two Muslims. Like Ezbet Kamel, the streets of Ezbet Al-Aqbat were sprayed with bullets from random gunfire. On that occasion, the militants also broke down the doors of several houses and killed those inside.

"They attack us because we are peaceful," said Bishop Kyrollos of the Naga Hammadi diocese, who visited Ezbet Kamel to offer condolences to the families of the victims, both Muslim and Christian.

Asked whether innocent Christians were paying the price for the continuing confrontation between the government and the militants, Bishop Kyrollos said: "We [Christians] are part of this country. As Egyptian citizens, we, too, are paying the price of the ongoing terrorism."

He said he believed the militants had timed their attack to coincide with President Hosni Mubarak's visit to the United States. The raid took place on the same day Mubarak met American businessmen in Chicago to encourage American investment in all parts of Egypt, including the south, Kyrollos said. "They want to destroy the economy and to prevent any development effort in this part of the country," he added.

Families of the victims interviewed by the *Weekly* agreed that Muslims and Christians have been living side by side in the village for years without any incidents of violence or feelings of animosity.

"We work on the same land, eat the same food, exchange visits and take part in weddings and funerals," said Ashraf Ghattas, a 19-year-old Christian. "There is no difference here between a Muslim and a Christian."

Sarah Mansour, the sister of the tailor who was killed in his shop, said the "terrorists" who killed her brother do not differentiate between a Muslim and a Christian. "May God destroy all of them [terrorists] and send them to hell," she wept, as a dozen women relatives surrounded her and mourned their victim.

Security forces, backed by reinforcements from nearby areas, besieged sprawling sugar-cane fields and searched hills and caves in Qena, while villagers carrying licensed weapons set up checkpoints in the area.

Reports in the Arabic-language press quoted police sources as saying the attack was led by three notorious "terrorists" — Ali Abdel-Razek Attiya, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim El-Farshouti and Anwar Hamed Abbas.

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, in a published statement, said security authorities have obtained "thorough information about the identities of the attackers." The attack, he added, was "one of the desperate attempts of a renegade group of criminals... seeking to disrupt Egypt's economic progress and undermine tourism. But these operations will not thwart the hopes and aspirations of an entire people."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

A time for dying

The controversy over whether transplanting organs from clinically dead people should be legalised continues unabated. **Shaden Shehab** reports

Although the majority of countries, including conservative states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have legalised organ transplants from clinically dead people, Egyptian scientific and religious figures continue to debate the issue.

The arguments for and against legislation stem from different definitions of death: does it occur when the brain stops functioning or when the heart stops beating? Doctors say that once the brain stops functioning, "clinical" death has occurred, but religious scholars insist that a person is dead only when all his body functions come to a halt.

Despite the debate, a draft law legalising tranplants from clinically dead people is pending in parliament.

At a meeting of the health committee of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) last week, Dr Khairi El-Samra, a neurologist and committee chairman, said: "We, as doctors, affirm that if a person's brain stem dies, which results in a coma, there is no hope he will recover." He added that diagnosing the death of the brain stem is an easy matter for doctors and so "mistakes are not likely to happen."

The Grand Mufti of the Republic, Nasr Farid Wassel, was present at the meeting, but only to "listen to the medical point of view," and he did not take a position on the issue. "Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy is the body that will give the final word on whether organ transplants from clinically dead people is prohibited or not by Islam," he said.

But Hamdi Zaqzouq, minister of *awqaf* (religious endowments) and an Academy member, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "We absolutely cannot speed up a person's death. This is the Academy's position," indicating that the Academy would reject the notion of clinical death.

Declaring that "medical and religious matters should not be confused," Zaqzouq said that transplants from a completely dead person are allowed, with the permission of the deceased or his close relatives. From a medical perspective, however, such transplants are not viable because the organs of a completely dead person are unusable, with the exception of the eye cornea, which can be used for up to six hours after death.

Al-Azhar's Sheikh Sayed Tantawi took the same position when he was serving as Mufti of the Republic. He said then that transplants are permissible only from completely dead people, although he tolerated kidney transplants from living persons.

Popular preacher Sheikh Metwalli El-Shaarawi took an even more rigid position. He said that human organs are not for trading and that the body does not belong to the person but to God who alone has the right to dispose of it as he pleases.

On the other hand, professors of law and medicine at the Nile Delta town of Mansoura have prepared a draft law legalising transplants from clinically dead people.

The professors managed to persuade some members of the People's Assembly to submit the draft to the house, but it is not due for debate yet.

The draft makes donating parts of the body permissible if they are vitally needed by the recipient and not harmful to a living donor. The sale of body parts is prohibited, the draft states, and the minister of health should designate the hospitals where transplant operations can take place. In the case of dead donors, the permission of the deceased or his first or second degree relatives is also necessary. Doctors have to certify that the donor is dead, the draft states, using language that makes it clear that clinical death is what is meant.

Dr Mohamed Hafez, dean of Mansoura University's Faculty of Medicine, said: "We had to prepare this law in order to legalise organ transplants." The draft imposes restrictions to prevent the development of an 'organ trade', he said.

"I really hope that organ transplants become legalised because it is poor people who cannot afford to travel abroad who lose out," Hafez said. He explained that a liver transplant costs at least LE500,000 abroad whereas in Egypt it would cost a maximum LE20,000.

Dr Sherif Omar, a cancer specialist who heads the medical and environmental committee of the People's Assembly, said the government is planning to sponsor the draft law. He took the position that a person is dead when the brain stem dies, adding that this is "the view of many countries, even conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia."

But Omar said "strict guidelines and restrictions are necessary to prevent the matter from turning into a trade." He suggested that organ transplants should be under government control. "They should be done by government-appointed doctors and in government-owned hospitals," he said.

Mohamed Moussa, head of the legislative committee of the People's Assembly, said that "it is high time we had a legislation to regulate organ transplants."

He said no draft laws had reached the committee yet, but the views of members "will depend greatly on what the Mufti and the Islamic Research Academy will have to say about the matter".

Moussa said: "We cannot ignore the fact that religious and social factors influence our position," but conceded that "the living are more deserving than the dead."

Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors' Syndicate, also said that "we have to wait until the Islamic Research Academy pronounces its opinion before discussing any laws, but they cannot be against *Shari'a*."

Mercedes scam goes to court

THE SUSPENDED chief of the Production Sector at the Radio and Television Union, Mamdouh El-Leithi, is to be tried by the Supreme Disciplinary Court on charges of abuse of influence and misuse of public funds. El-Leithi, and the Union's former chairman, Amin Bassiouni, will also be investigated by the public prosecution authorities for alleged financial malpractices. El-Leithi's trial opens on 2 April.

The decision to prosecute El-Leithi was taken by Sabri El-Beyali, chief of the Administrative Prosecution Department, which carried out an investigation that brought to light the alleged irregularities. The department, which has the responsibility of investigating the wrong-doings of government employees, also decided to notify the Illicit Earnings Bureau of El-Leithi's alleged financial irregularities.

El-Leithi, whose sector has a multi-million pound budget for producing television films and series, was suspended from work on 24 December for three months after an Arabic-language magazine accused him of receiving a Mercedes car as a gift from a Saudi Arabian businessman. El-Beyali said he has asked the Supreme Disciplinary Court to prolong the suspension for a further three months.

A statement issued by the Administrative Prosecution Department said its investigation had revealed "criminal and financial violations by a number of employees of the Radio and Television Union," the statement said.

Committing these violations became possible as a result of a "lack of administrative discipline," for which El-Leithi and Bassiouni were responsible, the statement said. "Remaining silent on the violations that were being committed amounts to quasi-acceptance," it added.

Under Egyptian law, the statement said, profiteering — a public official obtaining, or attempting to obtain, undue profit or gain for himself or others — is punishable by 15 years' imprisonment with hard labour.

El-Leithi will face 26 charges. These include the establishment of a company for the production and distribution of Arabic-language and foreign films — the same sphere of activity of the Production Sector of the Radio and Television Union which he headed. El-Leithi's company worked for the Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC), a London-based satellite channel owned by the Saudi businessman, and other satellite stations. He also engaged in commercial activity at two shops in Zamalek and Heliopolis, which he opened without notifying the tax department with the intention of evading taxes, the statement said.

It alleged that El-Leithi abused his position as chief of the Production Sector by ordering the technicians employed by the sector to work for his own private company to produce a television series which he later sold to MBC. He also used the equipment owned by the Radio and Television Union in making copies of films and series for his own private company.

El-Leithi also failed to refer actress Sherine Seif El-Nasr for questioning after she failed to show up for the shooting of a television series, in violation of her contract with the Union. Her absence caused the Union losses amounting to LE24,500.

According to the statement, El-Leithi "made himself the target of suspicion," by accepting a Mercedes car worth LE482,000 from the Saudi tycoon — a gift that does not correspond to any intellectual effort which he might have made or artistic work he might have produced. Actress Sherine Seif El-Nasr was also given a BMW car by the same tycoon after she failed to show up for the shooting of the television soap opera.

El-Leithi was paid LE317,000 in production fees as a result of contracts which he signed with one of his subordinates in the production sector, the statement said. He also committed other violations which added LE1,970,000 to the production costs of films and series made by the Union.

Peace at hand?

Hours before the resignation of Kabariti's cabinet was announced in Amman, **Lamis Andoni** talked to politicians in the Jordanian capital about the illusory Jordanian-Israeli normalisation process

Jordanians may never find out what triggered the young Jordanian soldier to fatally shoot seven Israeli schoolgirls near the borders last week. But what any Jordanian has come to realise is that the shots have dealt a fatal blow to the fragile three-year-old normalisation process between Jordan and Israel.

The fact that the soldier, Ahmed Mousa Daqamseh, belongs to a prominent East Bank Bedouin tribe, and the popular outpouring of sympathy for his family, revealed in stark terms that though Jordan might have ended its state of war with Israel, the era of normal relations has yet to come.

"The initial aspirations [of full-fledged normalisation] have proved to be far-fetched and are rapidly eroding. What the two countries have is an end to non-belligerence, but not a peace treaty as such," Ibrahim Ezzeddin, a respected former senior minister told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Well-informed Jordanian analysts say that the palace is considering a re-assessment of the strategy carried out by the government of Prime Minister Abdel-Karim Kabariti. The young prime minister, who was appointed a year ago, was one of a few Jordanian politicians ready to fulfil the palace's vision of full normalisation with Israel and to welcome the US-backed Iraqi opposition in Amman.

His government, which included a younger generation and some of the co-opted members of the opposition, represented a new pragmatic breed that was ready to re-adjust to an American dominated world order. The whole premise of the new government was that Jordan should adopt forward looking strategies to carve a political and economic role in "the post-peace era". The problem, however, is that peace — in a way that Jordanians could relate to — did not come. A fact that was further underscored by Binyamin Netanyahu's victory last May and the continued Israeli hardline policies against the Palestinians.

Moreover, what some Jordanians now feel is that Israel was not interested in developing economic ties with Jordan while it has been impeding economic ties between Jordan and the Palestinians.

"Israel needed agreements with Jordan and the Palestinians to open the doors to the Far East and other markets, and it got what it wanted. At the same time, it has made trade ties between the Jordanians and the Palestinians almost impossible because the Palestinian market is captive to Israel", Ezzeddin, who now heads the prestigious Shouman Cultural Foundation, said.

Jordanians have also not shown great enthusiasm for fostering economic ties with Israel. At a recent Israeli economic fair held in Amman, very few Jordanian businessmen showed up amid strong campaigns against all forms of normalisation with Israel.

Although there has always been considerable rejection to the terms of the 1994 Jordanian peace treaty it was the goal of normalisation that King Hussein personally pushed and promoted, that has broadened popular opposition to the government ties with Israel. As many critics, including former aides to King Hussein, have argued from the very outset, Jordan would be jeopardising it own stability by advancing ties with Israel prior to a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Two former prime ministers, Taher El-Masri, a Palestinian from Nablus, and Ahmed Obeidat, an East Banker from Irbid, have long emerged as two of the most outspoken opponents of what many viewed as a speedy normalisation process imposed from the top with little following by the Jordanian people.

But even if any of the king's former advisers have not raised their voices in public, most express serious misgivings about the whole process and have been sending messages to the palace to reconsider its policies. According to one former top-level official, chiefs of Bedouin tribes have been very resentful of what they describe "a humiliating Jordanian attitude to appease Israel."

"I have never heard these people before as critical of Jordanian policies," the senior official who spoke on condition of anonymity told the *Weekly*.

King Hussein has historically relied on the strong Bedouin tribes and East Bank families as a main reservoir for his army and security service. But in the last decade there have been indications that they are potential forces of social and political discontent. In 1989 anti-government riots against IMF-inspired fuel price hikes erupted in the south — a bedrock of Hashemite support. Again it was the predominantly East Bank south that exploded in anger over the government increase of bread prices last August.

As civil servants and army rank and file, these loyalist clans are also among the most severely hit by economic austerity measures since they rely on a fixed income. Thus, when the economic miracle that was much promoted by Jordanian officials to market the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty did not materialise, wider sections of the population were increasingly questioning the government's policies.

The failure of the peace treaty to bring about prosperity is a major but not the only reason for Jordanian discontent. The Palestinian plight, as events have proved again and again, is strongly embedded in the Jordanian collective psyche.

Jordanians have always been influenced by the political thermometer on the other side of the river. Jerusalem, in particular, has always been a catalyst for popular opposition in Jordan. Even though most political groups rejected outright the idea of killing children as an inappropriate reaction to Israeli policies, parliamentarians, trade unionists and intellectuals have jointly and individually called on the government to stop its normalisation process in protest against Israel's settlement expansion in East Jerusalem.

Plans are underway to stage a big political rally, unless banned by the government, to take place at the end of the month in solidarity with the Palestinians. Both Obeidat, Masri and other former officials will join the opposition in leading the rally.

"It has become clear that the idea that Jordan can simply disengage itself from its own Arab commitment toward the Palestinians has come to a dead end. There will be a need for a serious reassessment," said Dr Labib Kamhawi, a political analyst and leading opposition figure.

The government and the official media, anxious to deny any political meaning for last week's shooting, have dismissed Daqamseh as at best "insane" and a lone criminal. But most political analysts have seen the soldiers reaction as part of mounting Jordanian frustration with Israeli policies towards Jerusalem and the Palestinians. "The Israeli officials have been insulting and humiliating the Palestinians and their leaders. This is utterly unacceptable," Mounes Al-Razaz, a prominent Jordanian novelist and political commentator, told the *Weekly*.

Reuters correspondent, Suleiman Khalidi, reported that Jordanians living near the borders had rushed to donate blood to the wounded Israeli girls, but they were full of anger at Israeli policies.

The same attitude was expressed by leaders of the professional associations and politicians who called for an immediate halt to normalisation with Israel.

The strong Jordanian Bar Association has formed a committee of lawyers to defend Daqamseh who is expected to be sentenced to death by a Jordanian military court.

At stake for King Hussein, however, is not just the peace process that he is committed to, but what the shooting incident itself has triggered — alarm amongst top Jordanian officials about what has so far been considered a totally loyalist army. Thus, when King Hussein asked the tougher former intelligence chief to conduct a thorough investigation, it was clear that the monarch was seeking answers to what is happening inside the army.

There is no theory of conspiracy within the army. However, one act by one soldier is seen as enough reason to trigger serious investigation of potential re-organisation of the armed forces, analysts expect.

Meanwhile, all indications point to a potential political showdown between the palace and the opposition, unless the palace reconsiders its policies. Israel's determination to expand settlements in East Jerusalem will certainly add to the fire of popular resentment already existing in Jordan.

What next after Gaza?

Tarek Hassan reports on the explosive situation in Arab East Jerusalem following a meeting in Gaza that did not have the desired effect

Although the international conference held in Gaza last Saturday failed to create a mechanism for bringing effective international pressure on Israel to halt its transgressions against the Palestinians, the latter consider the meeting to have produced positive results. Ahmed Qurei, head of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that he had not expected the meeting to achieve anything beyond bringing together partners in the peace process and witnesses to the signing of the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

For Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, secretary-general of the Palestinian cabinet, the most significant result of the meeting is that the participants — all sponsors of the peace process — responded to the Palestinian invitation and thereby provided international support for Palestinian demands. They also showed a common understanding of the reasons for the Palestinian rejection of Israeli settlements and of Israel's attempt to alter the Arab nature of Jerusalem. Additionally, it led to a recognition of the need to abide by the terms of the agreements concluded between Israel and the Palestinians.

However, in view of the nature of the topics on the agenda, the results of the meeting cited by the Palestinians tend to be of a moral rather than a practical nature. The agenda sought to answer the following questions: How can the fair and accurate implementation of the agreements be guaranteed? How can moves taken unilaterally by Israel vis-à-vis settlements, the nature of Jerusalem and the confiscation of land, be effectively curbed? What is the role of the partners who co-signed or witnessed the signing of the peace agreements in guaranteeing the fair and accurate implementation of those agreements?

Placing those items on the agenda of the meeting in Gaza reflects the desire of the Palestinians to have the conferees create an arbitration panel to steer with fairness the implementation of existing agreements. Obviously, the meeting did not establish such a panel of arbitrators because, from the outset, the US and Israel foiled the possibility of such an outcome.

The US insisted that the Gaza meeting would not replace direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Washington also exerted strong pressure to restrict the level of participation. Thus the participants were low-level — consuls or accredited representatives to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The only exceptions were the Egyptian delegation headed by Ambassador Badr Hammam, assistant to the foreign minister, and the Jordanian delegation led by Nayef Al-Qadi, Jordan's representative to the League of Arab States. The US pressured the European Union to dissuade it from sending its envoy to the region, Miguel Moratinos. Instead, the French consul-general in occupied Jerusalem represented the Union.

During the consultations which preceded the Gaza meeting, the US and Norway officially asked Arafat to invite Israel to the meeting. The Palestinian president declined on the grounds that the meeting was convened to take definite positions on Israel's violations of the peace agreements.

Shimon Peres, leader of the opposition in Israel, had urged the Israeli government to invite the same participants to a parallel meeting in Israel. The Israeli government turned down this proposal for fear that such a meeting would turn into a panel of arbitrators adjudicating the dispute between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

During the Gaza meeting, Arafat enumerated 34 provisions in the peace agreements which have not been honoured by Israel. All pertain to the transitional period of the peace process. The US, on its part, prompted its representative to the meeting, Edward Abington, US consul-general in occupied Jerusalem, to firmly oppose any initiative suggested by the Palestinians for the creation of a mechanism that would commit Israel to implement signed agreements. The US also firmly rejected any joint statement by the participants expressing a common position regarding Israel's policies. Additionally, the US rejected an Egyptian proposal to send a message to Israel expressing concern over the deterioration of the peace process due to Israel's persistent policy of altering the Arab character of Jerusalem and of building new settlements on Arab territory. Instead, the US urged that each state represented at the meeting would express its position separately.

Palestinians raise their national flag above a protest tent set up near Beith Sahour, south of where Israeli soldiers have taken positions around the disputed hilltop Har Homa in South East Jerusalem *(photo: AFP)*

The Palestinians are fully aware that the US attitude at the Gaza meeting is in line with its policy of support for Israel as exemplified by its veto of a Security Council resolution condemning Israel's settlement policy. The Palestinians are profoundly disappointed and frustrated with the US behaviour because it encourages Israel to persist in its stubbornness in contravening all the agreements on the ground.

So far, the Palestinian leadership is trying to resort to peaceful means in dealing with the crisis. It is building up pressure in the Security Council against Israel in a second bid to get the international organisation to adopt a resolution condemning Israel's building of a settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim in eastern Jerusalem. The Palestinians may be hoping that the US will not use the veto again and they are banking on the opposition of Europe and the international community to the building of Jewish settlements in Arab Jerusalem.

In confronting the heavy equipment and bulldozers already levelling the site, the Palestinians have limited their reactions to peaceful protest. The Palestinian Authority has exhorted the Palestinian masses to exercise the utmost self-restraint, warning that the Israelis are only too keen to provoke the masses into a bloody encounter.

While the Palestinians have so far countered the building of Israeli settlements in Jerusalem by lobbying to secure large-scale condemnation of Israel's policies, there are no signs yet that Israel is submitting to this pressure. As bulldozers are working, the danger is mounting and the situation may well explode into violence beyond the control of both the Palestinians and Israelis.



No way out?

The withdrawal of a Kurdish party from the latest round of US-brokered peace talks threatens to put a political solution even further out of reach. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Last Sunday, the Iraqi Kurds observed one moment of silence in remembrance of the 5,000 victims who were massacred nine years to the day by President Saddam Hussein. The Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) official radio station was silent for five minutes to honour the memory of their Kurdish compatriots. Alleging that Iraqi Kurds had collaborated with Iran against Iraq during the eight-year war (1980-1988) between the two countries, Hussein's forces used lethal gas to kill residents of the Kurdish village of Halabja. In October of the same year, Hussein killed another 182,000 Kurds in what was known as Al-Anfal operation.

However, it would seem that mourning the victims of Saddam Hussein's many massacres of the Kurds is about the only thing that unites the various Kurdish factions in Iraq. Just a few days before the anniversary of the Halabja massacre, the two major Kurdish factions — the KDP led by Massoud Barazani and the Patriotic Union for Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani — suspended the US-brokered peace talks being held in Ankara.

The talks were brought to a halt last week by the assassination of a KDP official in the city of Arbil in northern Iraq. The assassination coincided with a meeting of representatives of the KDP, PUK and the no-fly zone's Turkoman minority in the Turkish capital for talks to consolidate their cease-fire accord. The meeting was also attended by US, British and Turkish delegates.

The KDP representative walked out of the meeting to protest the killing and said that "the PUK was behind the act of terror". The incident, observers say, deepens animosities in an area already strained by divisions. Many believe it could herald the beginning of another wave of violence in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"While the truce has been holding in northern Iraq, the warring Kurdish factions have still not signed a peace accord and this leaves the door open for all possibilities, including a fresh round of fighting," said one political analyst.

One observer of the Kurdish crisis said that the assassination attempt was carefully planned to thwart the Ankara meeting and to further hinder US efforts to bring an end to the fighting in Kurdistan

"There are too many culprits in this incident; it could be either a radical wing in Talabani's party, agents of Saddam's central government or even a radical wing in the KDP, which is trying to abort any peaceful settlement between the two factions," the source said. Iran will work on expanding its influence with Talabani's PUK, according to the source, "to thumb its nose at the United States and its pretensions of maintaining a western influence with the Iraqi Kurds."

"If the Kurds had been able to maintain a united front, the recent crisis might have been avoided," a source close to the KDP circles told the *Weekly*.

However, the source added, this doesn't absolve the United States of its role in this crisis, especially since it pledged to protect the Iraqi Kurdish people but instead helped to perpetuate a situation in which political and economic stability seemed impossible.

Access to limited financial resources became a major point of the KDP-PUK contention. The KDP's Barazani, largely in control of the areas bordering Turkey in the northwest, reaped the primary benefit of Ankara's illicit trade with Iraq through "tariffs" on Turkish truck traffic.

Open KDP-PUK fighting broke out in May 1994. Since then, US efforts to bring about a cease-fire between the two major Iraqi Kurdish factions have been, largely unsuccessful. The difficult task of brokering a cease-fire was not given high US priority until Saddam's forces began driving towards Arbil last August.

As one political observer put it: "The Kurds are their own worst enemy because the two [faction] leaders persist in living in a never-never land. And they have not yet been able to change their misconception of international politics. So there can be no return to democracy. The Kurds have been and will be the football of the Middle Eastern power struggle. Unfortunately, the Kurds permit themselves to be in that role."

One prominent figure in the Iraqi opposition told the *Weekly*: "The Western intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan has been negative since the UN embargo added to the suffering of those under the embargo imposed by the central government in Baghdad.

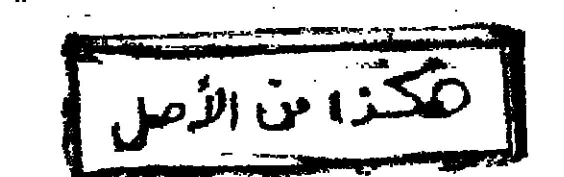
"There was no assistance on the part of the international community to help break the economic and political impasse which forced thousands of young Kurds to make a living out of joining the militias of the two parties."

He added that the political settlement which both the US and Turkey are trying to impose on the Iraqi Kurds will not be more than "a temporary truce that will not hold for long.

"Such a settlement will not guarantee permanent stability in Iraqi Kurdistan. On the contrary, it will be widely rejected by the Kurds, who will see it as yet another tool of American-Turkish hegemony over the area... Baghdad will also strongly object and will further escalate tension in the region," the source said.

The area, says the source, will remain unstable as long as the Iraqi government maintains its authority in the KDP-controlled region, Iran expands its influence in the area and Turkey works on establishing a security zone on Iraqi territory.

"The one way out is to establish a democratic government in Baghdad which recognises the national rights of the Kurdish people and grants them autonomy. This is when the Kurds could stand behind the Iraqi government against regional intervention, whether it comes from Turkey or Iran, and abort the US efforts to impose its hegemony," the source added.



هكذا من الأصل

Talked into an impasse

Although the opponents of a political settlement with Israel have no other option, writes **Lutfi El-Kholi** in this instalment of his series on Copenhagen, they continue to regard anyone who suggests a dialogue as a traitor. While they have been forced to recognise the existence of a powerful and well-armed enemy, they still persist in ignoring its presence

The opposition's statements on the Copenhagen Declaration and the international alliance for Arab-Israeli peace are divided into two main trends. The first, which emerged during the forties, rejects, under any circumstance, the very possibility of reaching a peaceful, just and comprehensive political settlement between Arabs and Israelis. Why? Because it is a "struggle for existence". Therefore, settlement with the usurper of Arab territories in Palestine or elsewhere is inconceivable. The "struggle for existence" means terminating Israeli existence, as an entity, state, and society, whereas political settlement, by its very nature and under the best of conditions, only presents half solutions. These necessarily recognise the reality of Israel's existence and, consequently, mean that the Arabs would be making concessions to the enemy, sanctioning Israel's illegal occupation of the land. That occupation, imposed by force of arms and supported politically and materially by the major powers of the world (colonialist, imperialist, and the West in general) would be subsequently transformed into a legitimate presence acceptable to the Arabs.

According to the view held by adherents of this trend, the Copenhagen Declaration with its alliance for peace, in which only a "handful" of Arab intellectuals participated, constitutes "fragmentation" of the unified, solid resistance of the Arab front against Israel in the struggle for existence. This is the same front which they believe came into being in 1947-1948.

The second stream opposing the Copenhagen Declaration usually concedes the possibility of peace in principle. According to their opinion, nobody can stand against peace. Nevertheless, they ask: what kind of peace do we want ? They answer their own question: a just comprehensive peace achieved by Israel's unconditional restoration of occupied land to its rightful owners. Yet this trend never defines the means of accomplishing the objective. According to the view of some others, it is imperative that Israel should reject the Zionist creed. Therefore, any dialogue with the Israelis proposed by individuals or groups raising the banner of peace, prior to practical steps taken by Israel to comply with the commitment and implementation of peace on its own side will, in essence, constitute surrender to the enemy.

This group would brand all efforts, from the Madrid conference in 1991 and the land-for-peace formula, to the Oslo Agreements in 1993 and Sharm El-Sheikh in 1995, as surrender. Some see Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli agreement of 1979 as the beginning of the current series of Arab defeats. Some go even further back in time and see Egypt's acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242, issued in the wake of the June War of 1967, as the first surrender.

Hence, the intellectuals who agreed to participate in the Copenhagen Declaration undermined the Arabs' resistance and initiated the normalisation Israel has sought for years, because they considered themselves "mandated by Arab intellectuals". Without consulting their colleagues or compatriots, they proceeded "to work in secrecy until they had completed the preparation of the document".

These two trends come together on the normalisation issue.

I believe that the first trend remains completely consistent with the ideas it has advocated since 1948. Within the context of that epoch, the confrontations that governed it, and Israel's nature during the early process of its foundation as an imperialist reality forcibly implanted in the area, Arab determination expressed the national convictions that unanimously called for Israel's destruction. The Arab governments were adamant: liberating Palestine was the duty of Arab states and armies, according to established plans, without interference or confusion from any side. The first Arab-Israeli war broke out in 1948. Despite the valour of the Arab soldiers, the political leadership was beset by conflicts. The shipments of defective arms and the West's support of Israel from abroad clinched the defeat. While the Israeli forces led by Ben Gurion declared their acceptance of the UN partition plan — although this acceptance may in fact be seen as a temporary political tactic — one of the Zionist guerrillas assassinated Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN representative in charge of implementing the plan. Furthermore, the founders of Israel, when proclaiming its establishment in 1948, were careful not to delineate the borders, which indicates the absence of any actual or legally binding commitment to the partition plan or the UN resolution.

The calamity of 1948 did not produce any substantial political or intellectual changes. Perhaps the only exception is Egypt in 1952, to a certain extent. Following the "tragedy", all governments, parties and groups, right- or left-wing, regional or national, continued to deal with Israel as an "illusory entity", bound to disintegrate in due course. They applied this perception on the ground by tightening the blockade and the Arab boycott.

No effort was made to study Israel, determine its weaknesses and strong points, discover its social systems and monitor its domestic, regional, or international relations. Anyone who expressed interest in knowing Israel from the inside was perceived as a traitor who recognised its existence, or was attempting to make it real in Arab minds and policies.

In other words, all attempts to study or know the enemy were seen as surrender. Ignorance was considered a kind of national duty, the argument being that "denying the enemy's existence" in the Arab mind was capable of eliminating it in reality.

This Arab attitude was turned against the Arab Palestinians who dared to remain. They refused to respond to Arab calls to emigrate. Instead, they pursued their daily struggles with obstinate determination. The price for their bravery was their lives and freedom. They resisted repression until they were able, through international, not Arab, support, to impose their existence as an Arab Palestinian minority within Israel.

In 1968, I was participating in the international youth festival in Bulgaria, where an Israeli delegation including the two Palestinian poets Mahmoud Darwish and Samih Al-Qassem was also present. The Arab delegations were unanimous in boycotting the two Palestinians, on the grounds that they were carrying Israeli passports. I was one of a few Arabs who broke the boycott consensus, which I considered ludicrous and irresponsible according to any national or rational criteria. We organised an Arabic poetry evening for Darwish and Al-Qassem, and were also boycotted for the duration of the festival.

After the attack on Gaza following the July 1952 Revolution, Arab leaders awakened to the sudden realisation that Israel had expanded far beyond the partition borders. It had also developed its human, geographic, military, economic, social and technological capabilities.

For the first time, the Arab denial was shaken by the reality that Israel existed as an enemy. The idea that the military solution was the only option continued during this time and after the tripartite aggression of 1956.

This new turn of events was more realistic, at least from the theoretical viewpoint. Preparations for the final confrontation gave rise to violent reactions in the Arab camp. During the Cold War, the Arab regimes used the Israeli enemy as a pretext to justify their conflicts with other Arabs, to prevent unified co-operation between Arab countries, and to justify repressive practices, violations of freedom and democratic rights, and the absence of domestic and national development.

Ironically, Zionism was founded on the same refusal to recognise the actual existence of the Palestinians, as evidenced by the slogan "a land without people for a people without land."

This denial of the Palestinian people's existence governed the Zionist movement and, later, Israeli policy for decades. Golda Meir asked in the sixties: "Where are the Palestinian people?" In the seventies, Menachem Begin claimed that, historically, the Jews are the true people of Palestine.

This Zionist refusal to recognise Palestinians receded under the pressure of new data since the Intifada. New Israeli thoughts and trends jostle for place and openly recognise, in words and practice, the existence of the Palestinian people and their land. The new attitude, dubbed "the political settlement", is what the Likud, led by Netanyahu, who rode to power on a margin of less than one per cent, is trying to empty of its context, by stirring up intellectual, political and social conflicts within Israeli society, in an attempt to revive the traditional Zionist creed of a land without people.

Ever since the nineteenth century, however, the Zionists have been careful to amass as much information as possible about their enemies. Their efforts include the translation of works by Tawfiq El-Hakim, Naguib Mahfouz, and Mikhail Naima, and also entail closely following religious, ideological, political, social and tribal conflicts in the Arab world. While they were studying the Arabs, however, the Zionists also built up their economic and defence capabilities, in preparation for the final confrontation with the Arab world.

The rigidity that beset traditional Arab ideology in its management of the Arab-Israeli conflict brought it to the point of complete dependence on the progressive regimes alone, rather than on the aggregate of all the Arab forces and capabilities. The birth of Fatah in 1956 was considered a CIA plot. It must be noted that some Arab forces attribute any catastrophe to a CIA conspiracy, while ignoring the characteristics and shortcomings of the Arab domestic scene.

The Arab stance on Fatah changed to a certain extent after Abdel-Nasser granted it recognition. But this recognition was accompanied by other attempts in various Arab states to establish or encourage the founding of a loyal Palestinian revolutionary organisation.

Wars continued periodically between the Arabs and Israel until 1973. It became clear from experience and the exorbitant cost that both the Arab and Israeli sides were incapable of inflicting any crushing defeat. Furthermore, developments in the technology of mass destruction rendered it impossible to put an end to the struggle. Events, together with regional and international variables, exerted pressure that paved the way for a peaceful political settlement.

Since both war and peace were impossible, what could be done?

Opposition to a political settlement is justified in a general manner. First, Israel is perceived as a solid, hostile Zionist block. Differences among Israelis are disregarded because Zionist society, according to the opponents of a settlement, is founded on national consolidation which tolerates no differences in connection with its national objectives. This signifies that Israeli society is protected, by virtue of its Zionist nature, against conflicts, divisions and changes. If this were the case, it would be a singular geographical and historical exception. I would suggest that within Israel, given the conflicts of society and the pressures of life in a military fortress during nearly half a century, popular, pacifist Israeli forces have come into being. Furthermore, it is possible and even desirable to hold a dialogue with these forces. Yet Rabin, Netanyahu and Ygal Amir, Rabin's assassin, are all much the same, according to the perspective upheld by the opponents of a political settlement. The Arabs who went to Copenhagen fell into a trap, in this view, or at least were deluded by those claiming to represent the forces of peace in Israel.

Secondly, war is seen as the only means of conducting struggle and opposing the Copenhagen Declaration. In this light, dialogue will destroy the boycott — the only weapon left. This line of reasoning reveals the fact that one group has acknowledged Israel as a tough nut to crack. Nevertheless, this group no longer believes in the full military solution. Yet at the same time, it opposes and absolutely rejects the political, peaceful solution with the enemy, because it is the road to surrender and treason.

The same group is totally incapable of providing an alternative or other project, or even serious thoughts on how to confront the enemy by new means. It has, in fact, become captive of an absurd theory according to which war is impossible, but peace means surrender. This signifies the continued use of the blockade and boycott policy that began in 1948, despite the current opening of big markets stretching beyond national and regional borders, and despite the historic reality that, under blockade and boycott Israel has continued its expansion.

At the helm of a sinking ship

On the eve of the Russian-American summit, Boris Yeltsin is trying to revitalise his image. That is about all he can revitalise, writes Abdel-Malik Khalil from Moscow

In his recent address to the nation. Russian President Boris Yeltsin said that Russia's economy, depressed for six years, may see a slight growth this year, in the order of two per cent. One cannot help wonder what would cause such a revival. Taking into account an unrealistic budget for 1997 based on exaggerated revenue forecasts, the president's promise to pay arrears on wages and pensions by July seems far-fetched.

No doubt, Yeltsin's main achievement in his address was to reassert the power of the presidency and to show the nation that he is back in control. "The main idea was to show the general public who is the master of the house," commented Andrei Poinkovsky, director of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Moscow.

As if he had suddenly discovered that the present administration and government are corrupted and "getting fat", the president promised a government reshuffle. "He was like someone who arrived from another planet and just found all this mess," Poinkovsky said. Someone who will not be reshuffled, however, is Prime Minister Viktor Chernomydrin. Many observers believe that this is the most evident sign that the Russian president cannot assume personal responsibility for what he has boldly described as the "terrible" state of his nation.

The opposition claims that he is hostage to his powerful favourites whose only wish is to keep him in the presidential chair until they find an obedient successor to win the next presidential elections. Huge lobby groups that became rich in the past few years, many of which now are directly represented in the government, stand in the way of the needed reforms. "This stagnation is favourable for the dominant political and economic clans," stated Liliya Shevtsova, political analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The president's address disappointed almost everyone. "The president said everything right, but haven't we heard it all before?" the Mayor of Nizhny Novgorod, Boris Nenitsov, told reporters last week. Former President Mikhail Gorbachev was also disappointed with Yeltsin's speech. "[Yeltsin] is continuing the course that has brought Russia to a dead-end," he said. The last leader of the Soviet Union noted Yeltsin's remarks on the critical state of Russia and his fight against corruption, "but these are his policies, his command and his decisions. So it is with some difficulty one believes the president can bring the situation under control."

The only possible way for Yeltsin to convince Russian public opinion of his ability to rule was to immediately undertake concrete reforms. The first step in the government reshuffle was made the day following Yeltsin's speech. Former head of presidential administration Anatoly Chubais was appointed vice prime minister and was given the task of creating a compact, reform-minded new cabinet. The result of the current power struggle for the new cabinet will depend to a great extent on how Chubais deals with the opposition. He is attacked by two rival factions: the leftist opposition and the financial-industrial groupings. The latter were provoked when Chubais threatened to erode all their economic privileges by placing the interests of the Russian people above those of the big corporate interests in his drive for social and economic reforms.

Meanwhile, Premier Chernomyrdin pledged to make fundamental changes and fill the new government with young, market-oriented reformers not older than fifty. Chernomyrdin said that he was recruiting "professional market economists who are firm supporters of the president's reforms."

The Yeltsin-Clinton summit in Helsinki scheduled for today, "will be the most difficult one in Russian-US relations since I became president." Yeltsin told reporters. NATO's plans to take the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into its fold are bound to dominate the summit, although the two presidents are expected to discuss issues as diverse as nuclear disarmament and economic investment in Russia.

As for the opposition, it is as fragmented as ever. Only one issue unites various political parties. movements and organisations: their hatred of Chubais. He is one of the most disliked politicians in Russia today. Russians remember all too well how his privatisation campaign destroyed the well-being of the common people. But Yeltsin remains Chubais' most important ally. "We have never followed the instructions of Chubais in the past and we are not going to follow them in future. He won't stay long," said Communist leader Gennady Zuganov.

Meanwhile, one of the strongest opponents of Yeltsin, General Alexander Lebed, refuses to remain on the political sidelines. Lebed is popular and loved by the disadvantaged sections of Russian society. He actually formed, at long last, his own political party, the Russian People's Republican Party. "We do not find the path of criminal capitalism appropriate for us as it leads to poverty. Neither is radical communism adaptable. We choose the third path," Lebed told reporters over the weekend.

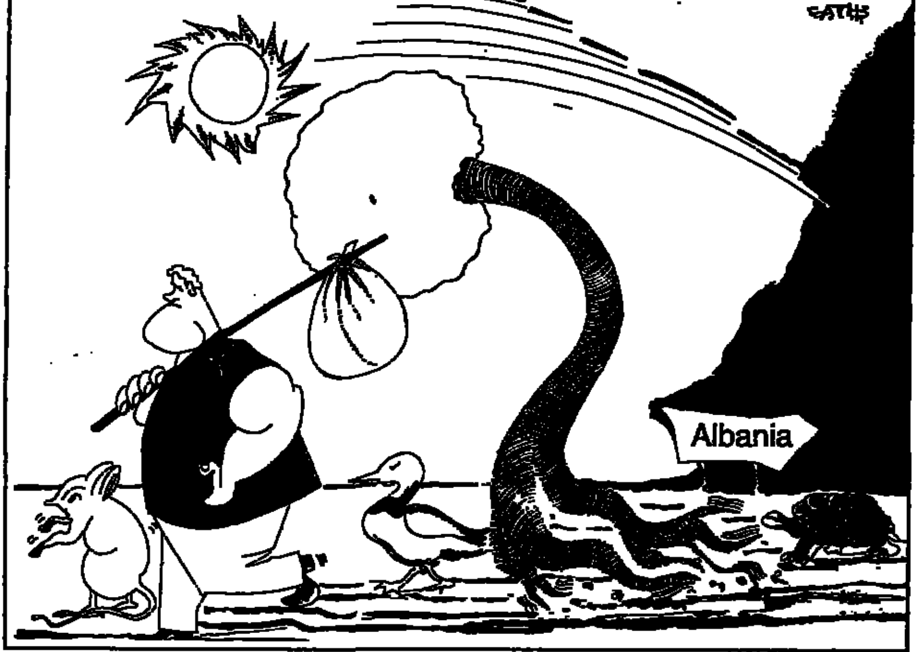
The first congress of Lebed's party took place on 14 March. The general appeared to feel lonely, as if he had not formed a serious team yet. World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov was at Lebed's side, giving the impression that he is the main adviser and supporter of the general. Most probably Kasparov's presence was meant to show that Lebed is far from being a brash nationalist and chauvinist and that the "Third Power Alliance" is supported by the Russian intelligentsia.

Forgotten Europeans?

Are Albanians the forgotten Europeans or are they just another lost Muslim cause? Gamal Nkrumah asks

A couple of years ago, Gianni Amelio's film *Lamerica* took Italy by storm. Shot entirely in Albania, *Lamerica* should have read *L'America*, but the film's title was meant to point at the ignorance of the Albanian immigrants to Italy. What was it that made Amelio's film strike Italy's popular imagination so vividly?

Lamerica was an honest attempt to get to the bottom of the phenomenon of the hundreds of thousands of Albanians fleeing their homeland for the greener pastures of Italy. Only a generation ago, Italians were the ones to go to the Americas where the streets were supposedly paved with gold. Amelio's film was an intriguing insight into the subterranean world of Albanian cities' slums where two intrepid Italian entrepreneurs and their poverty-stricken Albanian hosts interacted. After a disastrous escapade in what was portrayed as a God-forsaken land, one of the Italians found himself on a boat packed with immigrants fleeing the misery of Albania for a better life in Italy. *Lamerica* spanned vistas of despair.



Albanian President Sali Berisha himself is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. Berisha amnestied his arch-rival Fatos Nano, the popular leader of Albania's Socialist Party. Nano, a former premier, has languished in jail since 1993. Nano was sentenced to 12 years for misappropriating funds, even though a team of international jurists found him innocent because the evidence was insufficient to warrant his conviction. Once free, Nano appealed to his supporters to back the newly installed government of national reconciliation.

In many Albanians' eyes, Berisha's Democratic Party represents the unscrupulous capitalism which propped up the fraudulent pyramid investment fund schemes that have bankrupted the Albanian population. All the Democratic Party has to show for its efforts at instituting capitalism is corruption scandals and bogus investment schemes. Nano and Albania's last Communist leader Ramiz Alia, were among 600 political prisoners — mostly Socialists and former Communists — who escaped from jail this week when prison guards abandoned their posts. Following his amnesty, Nano called for Berisha to step down until free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections are held in June at the latest. Meanwhile, Berisha hastily installed Socialist economist Bashkim Fino as head of a caretaker government.

The late Enver Hoxha is probably turning in his grave. His so-called socialist paradise has turned into a farcical caricature of raw capitalism. Italian, Iranian, Saudi and other Gulf firms are setting up shop in the capital Tirana and other Albanian cities. Apart from Bosnia, Albania is the only predominantly Muslim nation in Europe. The Egyptian ambassador to Albania, Attia Karam, disclosed that the vast majority of Egyptians residing in Albania are working for Gulf companies. A number of Gulf construction, manufacturing and commercial concerns have opened representative offices in Albania since the collapse of Albania's Communist system in the early 1990s.

The current crisis has caused an exodus from Albania.

Ambassador Karam, in a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, said that he personally, "oversaw the evacuation of Egyptian nationals from Albania." He was at the head of a large convoy of several vehicles that left Tirana for the Adriatic port of Durrës. "Most women and children have been evacuated. Some 79 Egyptians have been given safe passage to the Greek island of Corfu, near the Albanian border. I coordinated activities with the Egyptian ambassador in Athens, Samir Seif El-Yazal. From Corfu, Egyptians were taken to the Greek mainland and transported overland to Athens where they were housed in a hotel overnight and left the following day to Cairo by a specially designated EgyptAir plane," Karam explained.

When push comes to shove, most foreigners and many Albanians want to leave the country. "Widespread disillusionment with pervasive corruption and the excesses of the market economy coupled with disgruntlement about the political system led to political unrest. Popular demonstrations erupted following the collapse of fraudulent pyramid investment schemes. Last week, civilians stormed military barracks and police stations around the country and helped themselves to arms and ammunition," Ambassador Karam explained.

Chaos ensued. At the time of the interview, Karam was busy attempting to facilitate the evacuation of an undisclosed number of Egyptians residing in Albania. "We are working closely with the Italian government. Italy's embassy in Albania and the Italian navy to evacuate Egyptians," he said. Three quarters of Albania's naval vessels now shelter in Italian ports. All international maritime traffic is being diverted to the Italian ports of Bari, Brindisi and Otaranto. Brindisi, across the Adriatic Sea from Albania, has borne the brunt of the exodus of Albanians from their troubled homeland.

"The breakdown of law and order in Albania was a terrifying experience. Mob violence was a constant threat, but generally foreigners and especially those from Arab countries were well treated. Things are much calmer now and citizens' committees are running many towns in Albania today," Ambassador Karam told the *Weekly*.

There are some 500 Egyptians in Albania. About 400 of them are still stranded there and it is extremely difficult for them to flee the chaotic country. "There are strong cultural and historical ties between Egypt and Albania. Mohamed Ali Pasha was of Albanian origin. Many members of the former Egyptian aristocracy trace their roots to Albania," Karam said. "There are some 200 Albanian students at Al-Azhar University and other institutions of higher learning in Egypt today," he added.

Whatever investors are after, Albania has it in abundance — vast mineral wealth; oil and natural gas; coal and abundant water resources; agricultural potential: a cheap and skilled workforce. Albania is potentially one of the richest countries in Europe. Its resource-rich base, however, does not mask the fact that it is Europe's poorest nation in terms of per capita income. It is also one of Europe's least developed countries.

"There is no genocide and no bloodbaths but there is deep disenchantment with the government and the authorities," the European commissioner in charge of relations with Albania, Hans Van den Broek said, describing the situation in Albania this week. "We must see what the prospects of getting a functioning authority in Albania are," he added. There are large Albanian minorities in the Serbian autonomous region of Kosovo and in the independent Balkan state of Macedonia. Civil unrest might spread to neighbouring territories. America does not want to intervene. Europe is pussyfooting over military intervention, but the Albanian political establishment, or rather what is left of it, is urging NATO and the EU to intervene. "How can we be expected to send policemen to a country where practically every inhabitant has a gun?" German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel told reporters earlier this week.

Albanian Defence Ministry spokesman Pandeli Ristani warned Monday that 10 radioactive tablets used for mine detection have gone missing. The Iranians are rumoured to have tried to woo Albanian nuclear scientists. Tiny Albania under Hoxha had ambitions of becoming a nuclear power and the Albanians collaborated with the Chinese on this matter. "We appeal to people to give up the radioactive tablets. Even if they are buried underground they are very dangerous," Ristani said.

During demonstrations, angry Albanians have waved placards reading "We are European too" and "We deserve European standards." Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl ruled out European military intervention, though, saying that it was "unthinkable." Popular uprisings and big demonstrations of people's power in eastern Europe are not unprecedented. A similar show of popular discontent took place in Bulgaria and Serbia last month. The situation in Albania is far more snarled, however. The pillaging of government and private property and the looting of shops and factories have left many foreigners fearful for their lives. There is no electricity or potable water. "Ordinary Albanians feel that the world has forgotten their distress," Ambassador Karam said.

CeBIT '97 showcases the latest software developments

Jörg Schomburg, director, Deutsche Messe AG, Hannover

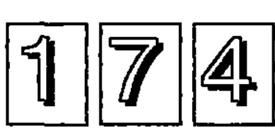
About 2,300 exhibitors at "Software, Consulting and Services" made up more than one-third of the total number of exhibitors at CeBIT '97, which ended 19 March in Hannover, Germany. Some major shifts are currently taking place in the software market — for example, the worldwide transition to open networks and systems, the emergence of new systems concepts and the broad-based trend towards multimedia solutions. Several of the exhibiting companies at CeBIT '97 presented sophisticated migration tools designed to transfer existing software to client/server structures. The most common target environment was Windows NT. The visiting public also saw new visual development tools for the programming language C++.

As in the past, CeBIT presented a vast array of software for virtually every task that can be performed on a computer. The main emphasis was on software for commercial and technical processes in small and medium-sized companies as well as specialist software for the public administration sector.

Workflow management and document management systems play a central role in the pursuit of productive and efficient business processes. These systems enable companies to react flexibly to delays, work overloads, excess capabilities and other situational problems. CeBIT '97 presented numerous standard workflow management systems with adaptable architectures which allow users to continue using their existing software solutions.

CeBIT '97 saw an increase in the number of exhibitors, reaching 6,855 exhibitors over last year's 6,549. The amount of rented space this year reached 354,493 square metres, up from 339,936 in 1996. Exhibitors displayed the latest developments in their areas of specialisation, which included information technology, software, telecommunications, banking technology, security equipment, R&D and technology transfer, consulting and services, and CIM and ADC hardware.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Crime news featured regularly in *Al-Ahram* a century ago. Reports included the customary wrongdoings along with new types of crimes that grew out of the influx of Europeans, who enjoyed special privileges, as well as the presence of British troops who occupied the country in 1882. A car accident in 1902, in which an Italian ran down an Egyptian, marked the debut of the automobile in Egypt. Our *Diwan* chronicler, Dr Yunan Labib Rizk, reviews some of the crimes that gripped *Al-Ahram*'s interest during that era and the social, economic and political factors that lay behind them



"Damanhur police arrested today a thief who, when searched, was found to be carrying keys that fit the locks of all the stores in the town. When the police searched the home of the thief, who has a police guard as his accomplice, they found a thousand and one types of goods. However, the thief is, in fact, kindhearted and not at all greedy. When he breaks into the stores with the keys he and his partner fabricated, he only removes items that the owners will not notice have gone missing until a long period of time has elapsed. Then, when the shopowners do discover their loss, they turn against their employees many of whom have been unjustly accused."

This report appeared in *Al-Ahram* of 8 September 1898. It is one of many items featured around a century ago in the newspaper's crime columns which, then as today, drew the readers' strong interest. Before continuing to comb early *Al-Ahram* editions for more crime stories, several observations must be made.

Crime, of course, has existed in human societies since Cain and Abel. However, the nature of the crimes themselves tends to keep pace with economic, social and even political developments.

In Egypt by the end of the 19th century, the capitalist system had firmly supplanted the feudal system. The circulation of capital and the establishment of large commercial and industrial enterprises gave rise to the presence of liquid cash assets. Criminals naturally turned their sights upon capital goods. The thief of the feudal era would have been the "laundry line robber" or the "stewing-pot looter", whereas the thief under capitalism has become the bank robber and even the video burglar.

The evolution of a large private landowning class in Egyptian rural society increased the number of potential capitalist targets. It was customary for landowners, after selling their crops, to stash their profits in their own homes. Even in those days, after the banking system was relatively well-established and paper currency was introduced in 1898, landowners, particularly those of rural Egyptian origins, continued to deal in gold currency and remained reluctant to use banks. Rather, they generally purchased a small iron safe which they kept in their bedroom. The safe would become an irresistible target to the bands of thieves, as numerous *Al-Ahram* reports illustrate.

The increased presence of Europeans in Egypt would also lend crime a special flavour. Already by the turn of the century, there were over 100,000 Europeans in Egypt. By 1907, according to the national census, the number had reached almost 150,000. The largest foreign communities were those of the Greeks and Italians, whose crimes always provided unique fodder for *Al-Ahram*'s crime pages. To illustrate, one story, published on 27 August of 1907, reads; "Next Wednesday has been set for the prosecution of a Greek man who is a subject of the Ottoman government. The trial, which will take place in the National Court, in accordance with the wishes of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, is to try the defendant for having committed the sacrilege of having married four wives, each from a different country. The accused continues to claim that he had never been married before and has brought in false witnesses to testify on his behalf. The public is awaiting the court's ruling on this case with bated breath."

The development of the modern state and the rise of centralised government also gave rise to types of crimes previously unknown in the feudal era. In a feudal society, government employees were in effect partners to the state and obtained a share of government revenues. Such moneys were received under various names, which were not taken to be extra-legal, the most common of which was the *halwan* or gratuity. The modern state, however, introduced the concept of public monies which are spent in accordance with budgetary allocations set by the government. The government bureaucrat, under this system, is entitled to no more than his salary. It was from this point on that the embezzlement of public funds entered the vocabulary of criminal terminology.

A second political feature to affect the quality of crime — and punishment — at the turn of the century was the capitulation system, which gave immunity to nationals of certain countries from prosecution in the national courts. Individuals who enjoyed such immunity were either tried in the consular courts located in Egypt or in the courts of their own countries. *Al-Ahram* would follow through on these trials, sometimes expressing its approval of the verdict, but more frequently condemning the verdict as incommensurate to the crime that was committed.

Finally, the presence of a British garrison in Egypt would also produce crimes of a particular character. When the members of this garrison, generally isolated from day-to-day affairs in Egyptian life, came into contact with Egyptians and even members of other communities, friction could easily get out of control. Incidents of this nature not infrequently appeared on *Al-Ahram*'s crime pages, affording the newspaper, openly hostile to the foreign occupation, the opportunity to censure the behaviour of the British soldiers, almost transforming the crime page into an opinion column.

Then, as now, the novelty of the crime — the unusual, and even amusing twist — was an important feature that brought it to the pages of the newspaper. *Al-Ahram* brought to its readers a plethora of stories that, in spite of their upsetting contents, would somehow bring a smile to their lips. One such story was that which appeared on 10 February 1902 beneath the headline, "Murdered with a shoe". When villagers in the district of Minya Al-Qamh discovered the body of a young boy in a canal, the article reports, they "pulled the body out of the water and hastened to inform the district authorities. When the government men arrived, they examined the body and discovered an envelope in the pocket of the deceased. From this envelope, the investigators knew immediately that the deceased was a pupil at one of the nearby schools. Town criers in Benha and Minya Al-Qamh were instructed to inquire about missing pupils. The people of Benha informed them about a schoolboy called Mohamed Afifi whose father had given him a pair of shoes and sent him to the shoemaker to have a duplicate pair made. It was on his way to the shoemakers that Mohamed was intercepted by a ruffian who killed the young boy in order to steal the shoes."

From Kafr Damru in Gharbiya comes the story in which, "a woman carrying a bundle of straw on her head was attacked by a water buffalo that butted her violently with its horns. When the health inspector from Mahalla Kubra arrived to examine and treat her, she stated that the water buffalo had attacked her "without provocation".

"All for a water melon" was the title of another item, from Minya this time. It relates that two men had wagered a bet over the colour of the water melon pips, one claiming they would be black, the other white. "When they split open the water melon, the loser flew into a temper, pulled out a knife and stabbed his betting partner in the stomach, causing immediate death."

Exaggeration and sensationalism were — and probably continue to be — characteristics of crime reporting. In this light, rural crimes reported in *Al-Ahram* can be subdivided into three categories. The first are traditional crimes native to the Egyptian village even before the social and economic changes brought about by capitalist transformation. Of these we have livestock theft which involved breaking into the barns where the animals were kept and luring the animals out. More often than not, victims of such thefts would be able to get the stolen animals back after paying a form of ransom and, given the value of livestock to the Egyptian peasants, they were prepared to pay considerable sums.

New to rural crime of that epoch was the deliberate uprooting and arson of crops. Capitalism brought with it the introduction of cash crops, notably cotton. Given the heavy investment involved in such crops and the "ruination" it would bring to the owners, this crime was not infrequently one of the manifestations of local vendettas, one of the causes for which would be the rivalry between two families over leading positions in the village. Crimes in this category also extended to the poisoning of animals, another innovation of the era.

So frequent had such crimes become that the correspondent in Fuwah felt compelled to speak out in an article entitled "The poisoning of livestock and the deliberate destruction of crops." Appearing in *Al-Ahram* of 4 April 1902, the article commented, "These two diseases have become so endemic in the nation that they will jeopardise its material welfare unless the government acts to kill the germs that cause them. In so doing, it must take the same severe measures and precautions taken when combating fatal illnesses such as the plague and cholera."

Evidently, poisoning was not restricted to livestock. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Menufiya complained, "The situation has come to be that wives are poisoning their husbands, husbands their wives, and sons their cousins. The author appealed to the government to prevent pharmacists and herbalists from selling poisonous substances and to impose harsh penalties on those who do not comply and "to hold them as accomplices in the crime of poisoning."

The third category of rural crime comprised breaking and entering into the homes of the landed gentry. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Damanhur noted the rise in such crimes in particular, after thieves broke into the home of an affluent local landowner, "killing him, threatening his wife and making off with a wooden trunk that contained bonds and money. This incident has stirred considerable consternation among the well-to-do and all those who might be considered wealthy."

Moving from the countryside to the city, where the impact of the social and economic developments of the late 19th century were more immediately and deeply felt, *Al-Ahram* covered the types of crime that occurred there with the same ardour and concern.

Just as the increased presence of Europeans had a positive impact on urban life, so it had a negative one, bringing with it new types of crime hitherto unknown in Egypt. Many of these had as there protagonists members of the Italian and Greek communities. It is also in these incidents that firearms and stilettos made their first appearance.

Of greater significance were the crimes of smuggling, forgery and swindling in which the Europeans excelled, possessing as they did at the time the necessary degree of specialisation that Egyptians were yet to acquire.

"Israelites" appeared to excel in the first type of crime, having even formed special gangs for the purpose. Forgery was an Italian specialty. It was an area that demanded particular expertise. In mid-September 1901 *Al-Ahram* reported that a young Italian had been apprehended for "forging bonds and shares in the name of an Egyptian real-estate company and a brokerage firm in Alexandria." He was taken into custody by the Italian consulate in the city and put in prison.

In 1900, a case of financial swindle erupted with the same force as the recent money management schemes. The culprit in this case was a certain Monsieur Simon Philipard, a Belgian whose victims were mostly Europeans. So much has been written about this case that perhaps it is best to summarise by citing the ruling that was pronounced against him on 6 November 1900 by the Alexandria Court. Philipard was sentenced to two years in prison and the payment of a fine for having "fraudulently embezzled or squandered over various intervals 1,599 shares in the Alexandria Tramway Company and 196 shares in the Ramla Railway Company, said shares having been consigned to him on the condition that he return them or use them as directed. The accused has also been found guilty of the charge of obtaining or having sought to obtain subscriptions or financial payments in return for subscribing to shares in the Industrial Bank and for having, with intent to defraud and swindle; published notice of spurious subscriptions and like payments."

The scrapes between the British occupation army and the local civilian population sparked numerous incidents which were always potential powder kegs. Given its nationalist sentiments, there is little doubt as to where *Al-Ahram*'s sympathies lay. "The mighty sentinel" was the headline of an article which appeared in September 1901 describing an incident in which "An English soldier rammed his bicycle into an Egyptian sentinel. When he managed to stand up, the sentinel asked the soldier to accompany him to the police station. The soldier refused. The sentinel pressed his insistence and, against the soldier's persistent refusal, the two men came to blows. A passing British cavalry officer saw the brawl and, noticing that his compatriot was the weaker party, he attempted to intervene. He asked the Egyptian to desist and leave. The Egyptian paid no heed to the officer. Irked that the guard showed no fear of his authority, the cavalry officer took out his sword and struck the guard in the face, inflicting a light wound. When the two British soldiers realised that they had escalated a minor incident into a crime that had already brought a large crowd to the scene, they fled. So fast was their flight that the cavalry officer left his sword behind in the hands of the mighty Egyptian sentinel."

The new modern transportation systems claimed numerous victims, reports of which filled the pages of *Al-Ahram*. There was a unique story from Alexandria dated in January 1902 in which an "Italian engineer ran over an Egyptian in Bab El-Sharqi Street." We believe that this marked the debut of the automobile in Egypt. At the time, ownership of this new invention was largely restricted to new inventions.

Al-Ahram of a century ago features some stories involving the embezzlement of public funds, a crime that gained prominence with the rise of the modern state bureaucracy. One example: Abdel-Maqsud, a deputy post office master in Port Said, was transferred to another location, upon which it was discovered that LE896 were missing in his ledgers. That was a considerable sum for the time, considering that it was equivalent to the value of 20 feddans of land.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Spinning and weaving in tangled web

A Central Auditing Agency report reveals that Egypt's textile industry is in danger of falling apart at the seams. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

"New market conditions and agricultural reform policies are making things tough for Egypt's extremely vital spinning and weaving industry," emphasised a Central Auditing Agency (CAA) report submitted to the People's Assembly this week. The 80-page report, which, over the last few days, was the subject of fierce debates in the parliament's Industry Committee, reviewed the financial conditions, for fiscal year 1994-95, of 31 textile companies affiliated to three holding companies.

According to the report, 11 companies had incurred staggering losses while four were not able to maintain the same level of profits realised in 1995. However, the report indicated, nine others were able to reduce their losses and one company began to realise profits after years of mounting losses. "In all, only six companies were able to generate greater profits in 1994/95," the report said.

The report emphasised that the increase in the number of loss-making companies (from seven in 1994 to 11 in 1995) was largely due to the liberalisation of agricultural sector policies — a move in which the price of cotton was raised on average from LE300 to LE500 per qantar. This increase, the report indicated, led in turn to the rocketing of production costs. Compounding matters, the report added, is the fact that the textile sector is still plagued by the same, chronic problems it has faced in the past. Foremost among these are a huge, unsold inventory, severe technical problems, modest productive and marketing capacities, lack of cash liquidity and a long record of debts to commercial banks.

In a plenary session of the Assembly, held last Saturday, Amin Mubarak, chairman of the Industry Committee, lashed out at the government, holding it directly responsible for the dramatic losses incurred by these companies. Mubarak revealed that the total losses accumulated by these companies rose from LE732 million in June 1995 to LE1.379 billion in June 1996 and to LE2.267 billion at the end of 1996. "The government remains silent on all of these losses which, this year, are even expected to reach a record of LE4 billion," Mubarak told the Assembly.

Topping the list of loss-making companies is the Daqahliyya Spinning and Weaving Company (DSWC), an affiliate of the Holding Company for Spinning, Weaving and Ready-made Garments (HCSWRG). The report noted that the company incurred a financial deficit of LE56.263 million in June 1995 while, in June 1994, it had a net surplus of LE1.375 million. It said that the DSWC's cash liquidity dropped to a mere 4.4 per cent of its total capital in June 1995, down from 30.7 per cent in June 1994. Moreover, the report noted, the company had registered an accumulated financial deficit of LE16.292 million before June 1995. These financial imbalances forced the company to increasingly depend on high interest, short-term loans and overdraft borrowing from banks in order to finance its production operations. According to the report, the value of short-term loans and overdraft borrowing rose from LE103.635 million in June 1994 to LE148.683 million in June 1995, leaving the company in no position at all to pay back its short-term loans. The report attributed the DSWC's financial imbalances to the dramatic rise in costs of production inputs, especially cotton deliveries. The value of production inputs, said the report, increased by LE16.651 million (14.3 per cent) from June 1994 to June 1995.

Another loss-making company cited in the report was the Egyptian Company for Wool Spinning and Weaving (Wooltex), an affiliate of the Textile Manufacturing and Trade Holding Company (TMTHC). Due to its modest productive capacities, Wooltex was able to achieve only 22.9 per cent of targeted production level. Therefore, the report said, the value of total sales fell from around LE46 million in June 1994 to LE43.3 million in June 1995, while the value of the unsold inventory climbed to LE65.2 million in June 1995, or by 16.5 per cent from June 1994's level. Similarly, the report said, the value of overdraft borrowing from banks increased from LE85.6 million in June 1994 to LE103.8 million in June 1995, while Wooltex's cash liquidity fell from 24.5 per cent in 1994 to 23.8 per cent in 1995.

Topping the list of seven profitable companies was the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company (MSWC). According to the report, although production input costs increased by 10.9 per cent to reach LE402.6 million, MSWC, an affiliate of HCSWRG, achieved a net financial surplus of LE27.081 million. The reason for this increase was the rise in MSWC's production capacities. The company was able to fulfill 98 per cent of the targeted volume of production, estimated at LE716.4 million in June 1995.

The General Jute Products Company (GJPC), an affiliate of HCCIT, is another firm on the list of profit-making companies. The report indicated that GJPC's efforts to improve its technical performance led to the company exceeding its targeted volume of production and boosting total sales from LE50.717 million in June 1994 to LE71.046 million in June 1995. GJPC was also able to reduce its banks debts from LE21.2 million in June 1994 to LE18.5 million in June 1995.

Abdel-Hakim Haggag, chairman of HCSWRG, proposed that loss-making companies be classified into three groups: the first should include companies, such as Helwan Spinning and Weaving, that should be liquidated since their losses have reached such drastic levels. The second group, he stated, should include the companies which could be leased to specialised international companies in an attempt to upgrade their performance and raise production.

The third group, he said, should include the profitable companies which should be privatised on the stock market. The Industry Committee also called for reducing tariffs on imported spinning and weaving equipment to 5 per cent and protecting the local market from dumping and imports of subsidised ready-made garments.

For its part, the Shura Council has concluded this week intensive debates on a 226-page report on the Egyptian Textile Industry. Minister of Trade and Supply Ahmed Guweily emphasised that although the liberalisation of the cotton trade left a negative impact on the textile industry, it was necessary to boost Egyptian cotton exports. To offset the negative impact, however, Guweily stated that the government will soon submit to parliament a new law to establish a fund for balancing cotton prices. This fund, he added, will provide an indirect subsidy to the spinning and weaving industry in an attempt to improve its performance and solve its financial and administrative problems.

Egypt's financiers in hot global race

The Egyptian banking sector and the capital market are bracing for tough global competition, reports **Aziza Sami**

In a move heralded as a turning point for the Egyptian banking sector, two leading Egyptian banks, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) and the Egyptian-Arab-African Bank, have applied for membership to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), an organisation which includes 240 of the industrialised countries' leading commercial and investment banks.

According to Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, the NBE's chairman and head of the Egyptian Banks' Federation, the formal entry of these two banks into an association representing the global banking community highlights the fact that "the Egyptian banking sector is positioning itself to compete strongly in the world's financial markets, in the soliciting of private investment funds and promoting fiscal growth."

"To my knowledge, the requests of the two banks to join the IIF, will soon be followed by requests by a few other Egyptian banks and will surely be accepted," said Charles Dallara, managing director of the IIF, whose ranks include, among others, the Bank of Japan, Swiss Bank, Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley, JP Morgan and Goldman-Sachs.

"The international community recognises the growing competitiveness of the Egyptian banking system, the general improvement in terms of efficiency, risk management, competitiveness, technology and training of personnel" said Dallara.

The bid for entry into the IIF by these two banks comes in the wake of the intense activation of the Egyptian capital market, which approached international institutional investors for the first time in July 1996. The market gained great momentum in the second half of 1996, with the 3 July launching of institutional funds from Hong Kong's Shanghai Group, Lazarres Freres and Capital Alliance. Further fueling investor interest was the issuing of Global Depository Receipts (GDR) for the Commercial International Bank and the Suez Cement Company.

Also, in 1996, international financial institutions such as Goldman-Sachs, Standard and Poor's and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) put Egypt on their index of emerging markets, a move that placed Egypt in a position to directly tap into the world's capital markets and, for the first time, to look beyond official funding agencies such as the IMF and the World bank for funds that can now be raised through equity flows.

But the nascent integration of the Egyptian capital market into the world economy has, nevertheless, set rigorous standards for competition — especially for the banks. Now, with a concerted push towards economic liberalisation and deregulation, banks are fast becoming an important backbone for investment operations in the capital market. Consequently, the dynamic role envisaged for banks in the rapidly reforming Egyptian economy has highlighted the need for upgrading the efficiency of these institutions and modernising their technology.

"Both the banking and financial systems need to be upgraded. We need to direct our efforts towards improving the banks' methods of capitalisation and their credit policies," said Abdel-Aziz . "We have also solicited the help of the European Union (EU) in adopting the 'universal banking' model followed in Europe, which involves developing the investment and commercial functions of banks, mobilising capital, buying, selling, and managing corporate medium and long-term lending."

Moreover, as banks increase their scope of activity and the need for more such institutions arises, legal changes are in the works. The Banks' Federation, along with the IFC and Arab Monetary Fund, are currently establishing a rating company for the evaluation of banks and securities. This, however, will involve some modifications in the capital market law which considers such companies to be brokerage bodies.

"We are fighting to change the laws, to be able to regulate new operations such as mortgage and financial leases," said Abdel-Aziz.

"Leading banks operating in the capital market have yet to develop their brokerage and market-making capacity and strengthen their base in order to go into the global capital market for the equity issuance of GDRs and other similar techniques," said Dallara. "In this, they will be competing not just with Egyptian banks, but with a full range of global banks, such as Citibank and Morgan Stanley although they have the advantage of the local market."

Coupled with legal reforms for banks, the capital market must also be upgraded. Consequently, Egyptian banks are also undertaking procedures to develop the local debt market.

"The securities market in Egypt is quite well advanced in terms of developing rules for transparency and disclosure, and deepening liquidity in the market," said Dallara. "Development of the local equity market, as well as the local debt market, is important also. In addition to the local equity markets, it would be very beneficial, as another source of inter-mediation in the economy, to have local, medium-term debt markets, not just for the government debt, but also for other types of commercial debt. If your have a very strong securities market — and clearly this is coming into place — and if you can supplement this with the development of the domestic bond markets, I think Egypt will have the requisite financial system that allows local and foreign savings to be channeled into efficient investment opportunities."

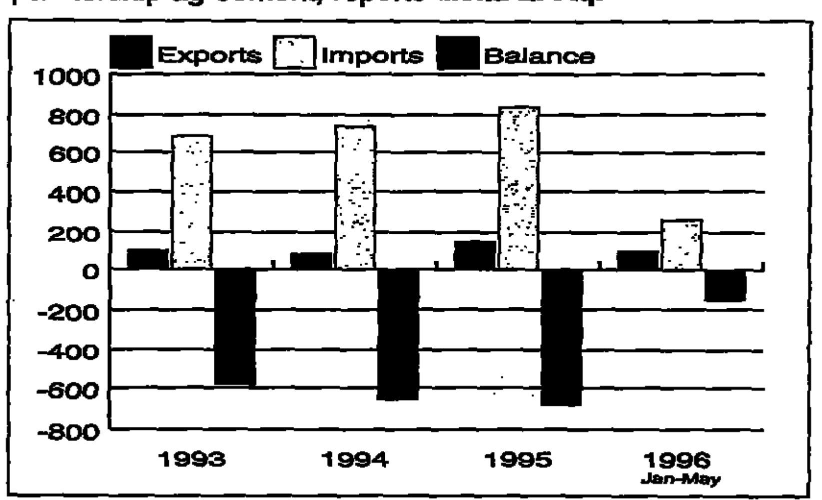
"In 1996, an estimated $231 billion in private capital moved from the industrial to the developing world," Dallara noted.

In Egypt, capital inflows have greatly accelerated over the past year — with the gross amount of portfolio capital inflows since March 1996 exceeding $700 million. Nevertheless, continued Dallara, "Egypt, if you put it on the map of the world's emerging capital markets, is still a small player although globally, there is potential for growth. I would, however, not be surprised if in the next few years, net portfolio figures, supplemented by direct investment flows, ranged between $3-5 billion." Such a situation would allow the Egyptian economy to meet the important condition restricting its dependence on external debt and portfolio equities. The economy would then be able to fulfil the dual function of soliciting the global debt markets and tapping into the equity market for portfolio and direct investment.

Some 70 to 75 per cent of foreign investment inflows since mid-1996 have come in the form of both medium and long-term institutional inflows. "But we still have to be able to properly accommodate and enhance domestic liquidity," said Abdel-Aziz. "In this vein, privatisation and capital market growth and reform are instrumental in first securing indirect investments through the stock exchange and then, once investors are more confident in the performance of the economy, direct investments."

Progress toward Egypt-EU accord

Negotiators from Egypt and the EU have managed to take one step closer to concluding the long-awaited Egypt-EU partnership agreement, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**



As the ninth round of negotiations for the Egypt-European Union (EU) partnership agreement drew to a close last week, the Egyptian delegation walked away feeling confident about progress made in the thorny agricultural issue and the tone of the talks.

During the negotiations, which were held in Cairo, the Egyptian side succeeded in having more that 100 of the country's agricultural commodities approved in the Egypt-EU partnership agreement.

But despite these gains, the two sides have not yet overcome all the obstacles. Gamal El-Bayoumi, head of the Egyptian negotiating team, stressed that each side is trying its best to comply with the other's requests, and it is expected that an agreement between the two parties will be reached during the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Conference, scheduled to be held next April in Malta.

"The Egyptian side is ready to sign the agreement before Malta," he said. "We will not do so, however, at any price."

One of the main obstacles standing in the way of concluding this agreement over the past two years has been the issue of agricultural commodities. During the just-ended round of negotiations, the Egyptian team's primary focus was to secure an increase in both the agricultural quotas and access to European markets previously proposed by the EU, with particular emphasis on rice, oranges and potatoes.

Currently, while Europe accounts for roughly 50 per cent of Egypt's total imports, "Egyptian exports to Europe do not exceed one per cent of Europe's total imports and 0.5 per cent of its consumption," noted Bayoumi.

"The European team has been very understanding of Egypt's demands, but it seems that they have not been delegated enough authority to make a final decision," added the Egyptian side's chief negotiator. Consequently, they have asked for an opportunity to contact the European Commission (EC) in Brussels in order to reach a final decision concerning these issues as well as increasing the period during which certain agricultural products may be exported.

"Egypt is proving, as expected, to be a hard nut to crack," quipped Michael Webb, an official at the EC's Middle East Department. "But with a major effort, the negotiations should be completed and the agreement should be in force by 1997 or 1998."

The Euro-Mediterranean partnership is a network of bilateral and regional agreements of which the prjected Egypt-EU accord is a part. In seeking to promote cooperation between Europe and other Mediterranean countries, the partnership will help set aside various regional differences for the sake of creating a zone of peace, stability and prosperity. To this end, the partnership provides for ECU2 billion in socio-economic development loans and grants to EU partner countries, while also paying close attention to promoting the role of civil society and the private sector in development initiatives.

Webb further explained that the 12-year transitional period provided by the agreement meets the target date of establishing a free trade zone by 2010, as agreed upon in Barcelona.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Market report

Transactions slide

THE GENERAL Market Index, during the week ending 13 March, lost 1.4 points to close at 399.3. The drop in the value of transactions, however, was more drastic, plummeting from LE876 million to LE393 million in just one week of trading action.

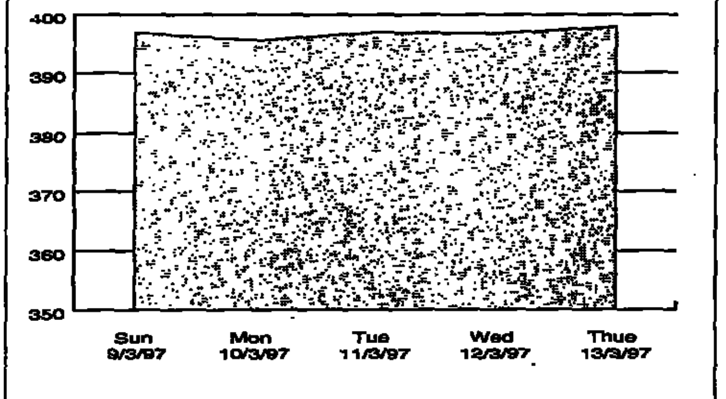
The big surprise for the week came in the form of a weak demand for shares of the Eastern Tobacco Company's second share offering. While the company put up another five million shares — 20 per cent of its equity — only 3.4 million shares found takers. Market experts cited delays in the processing of overseas purchase orders as the reason for the disappointing trading figures. Nevertheless, the value of the stock witnessed an LE6 increase and closed at LE106.

Also in the manufacturing sector, although it announced a 21 per cent increase in profits for the first half of fiscal 1996-97, shares of the East Delta Mills Company lost LE5 to level off at LE83. In doing so, the company joined ranks with the five other milling companies recording a loss in share value for the week.

In the construction industry, shares of the Cairo Housing and Urbanisation Company registered a 15.9 per cent gain in value to close at LE27.24. This increase comes in line with the 20 per cent equity offering made by the company on 12 March.

In the financial sector, shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) recorded the highest increase in share value for the week, with the stock gaining 21.53 per cent of its opening price and closing at LE108.

In all, the shares of 41 companies increased in value, 47 decreased and 39 remained unchanged.



Money & Business

Arab meeting to discuss free trade zone

THE SIX-member committee formed by the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League held a meeting recently at the League's general secretarial headquarters. Ministers of economy in Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Morocco and the Arab League secretary-general attended the meeting, headed by Jordanian Minister of Trade and Industry Ali Abu Ragheb.

By the end of the meeting, the committee had decided the final form of the executive programme of the accord concerned with facilitating and promoting trade between the Arab countries, aiming at establishing an Arab free trade zone by the year 2008, 10 years after the complete liberalisation of agricultural and industrial projects.

Safety on the road

THE NO Flats product is designed to seal punctures in the tread area of any pneumatic tyre in a bicycle seal up to 1/8 inch, in motorcycles up to 3/16 inch and up to 1/4 inch in automobile tyres. In bigger tyres it will seal up much larger punctures. The variation on puncture sizes is in accordance with the application.

No Flats works in conjunction with the rubber memory. When a nail breaks the tread surface, the rubber compresses itself against the nail. As soon as the nail is removed, the air pressure and the centrifugal force pushes the No Flats' compound into the hole, then the rubber returns to the original state prior to the puncture, compressing the liquid into the hole forming a permanent sealed plug.

$9 billion in claims paid out

STATISTICS issued by the *Munich Report* reveal that in 1996, insurance companies paid out only $9 billion in damages in spite of the number of disasters reaching 600.

Mohamed El-Tir, head of Misr Insurance Co and president of the Afro-Asian Re-insurance League, said that claims awarded in 1995 reached $14 billion, with $17 billion in 1994 and a staggering $24 billion in 1992. The drop in the figure this year can be attributed to the fact that while some 600 disasters took place in 1996, the majority of them occurred in areas with a lesser degree of population density.

It is worth mentioning that out of these 600 disasters, the vast majority were natural — with 200 hurricanes, 170 floods, 50 earthquakes and 30 volcanoes. The remainder were man-made disasters such as fires, oil spills and aviation disasters.

The largest amount of damages awarded by insurance companies for a single incident last year was from the damage left in the wake of Hurricane Fran, which struck the United States. Out of the $3 billion in damages which the hurricane inflicted, insurance companies covered $1.6 billion.

Duties and taxes reduced

MAMDOUH Thabit Mekki, under-secretary of the Federation of Egyptian Industries, member of the People's Assembly and member of the board of the Chamber of Commerce, emphasised the necessity of protecting Egyptian industry by reducing tariffs and taxes and increasing the amount of facilitations given, in order that they can compete internationally in light of the GATT and trade liberalisation policies.

Mekki stressed in particular the Egyptian pharmaceutical industry, which required special protection through legislation, in order to counteract the attempts made by international companies to monopolise the field. He added that not only this sector, but many other specialised sectors need similar forms of protection.

In another statement, Mekki said that the New Valley project in southern Egypt is but one of the large-scale projects currently underway which will herald Egypt's entry into the 21st century. Mekki stressed necessity of officials to adhere to President Mubarak's vision of the nation's future so that all aims can be realised.

However, that work is underway on large-scale projects should not cause us to turn away from small-scale projects. The under-secretary affirmed his belief in the ability of small-scale projects to provide job opportunities for youth, which will in turn serve in broadening the base for overall national development and economic prosperity.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Blood brothers

"Do we want terror or do we want peace?" demanded a stubborn Binyamin Netanyahu, speaking of what he said was concrete evidence that the PA had "given the green light" to violent attacks in protest against the construction of the Har Homa settlement. But would this question not have best been asked prior to the ground-breaking in Jebel Abu Ghneim?

Although Arafat has issued strict instructions that violence not be used as a means of protest, at this stage in the game there is little either he or anyone else can do to defuse a situation that is sure to spin madly out of control. Anyone, that is, save for Netanyahu. However, rather than backing down on his decision — a move that would cost him the support of hardlline Israelis — it is easier to use Arafat as a scapegoat for the violence likely to result from Israeli intransigence.

In a feeble bid to minimise Palestinian ire over this action, he has offered to pump in money to upgrade East Jerusalem's infrastructure and to build some apartments for the city's Arab residents. It is, however, unconscionable to believe that Arabs *and Palestinians would sell short the spirit of peace* — an ideology founded on honour, justice and compromise — for a few shekels and incentives thrown their way. Israel may be trying to buy time, but it will not be able to buy peace.

Nevertheless, as the settlement construction continues, the Israeli premier is still seeking to shirk responsibility for his actions, "demanding" that Arafat reverse the green light for violence or *"risk losing Israel as a partner in peace."* The irony and hypocrisy is staggering. While single-handedly doing everything in his power to undermine peace, Netanyahu is audacious enough to adopt a holier-than-thou attitude. Israel, he says, has as much right to build in Jerusalem as does the US in Washington DC or New York. The US, however, did not annex these cities and their status is not up for discussion.

Har Homa, and other similar tests of Palestinian patience and "commitment to peace" will undoubtedly bring about more bloodshed, Israeli thuggery and an opportunity for a sanctimonious Netanyahu to say, "I told you so."

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie. Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Asylum from responsibility

Islamist militancy: a foreign import? Rather, argues **Diaa Rashwan**, a reason to examine domestic problems

The accusations of "foreign" responsibility for Islamic violence in Egypt have surfaced once again. Noting the sharp decline in terrorist violence in 1996, officials continue to censure "external forces" for supporting militant Islamists inside the country, and insist that European governments should stop granting the right of residence to terrorists in their countries.

Blaming foreign powers for supporting Islamist violence in Egypt and other Arab countries is not new. Since the rate of violence began to intensify, such accusations have provided Arab officials with a last resort. Their anger is focused on the outside world because they are convinced that other countries provide "terrorist" leaders with a rallying point from which to *direct operations within* the Arab world, where local Islamists implement their plans. Indeed, in many cases, this external component assumes such magnitude that it becomes virtually the sole factor responsible for the expansion and intensification of Islamist violence.

One might understand the tendency of Arab security agencies to cast the *blame on foreign* countries in light of their incapacity to control extremist violence and their need for a scapegoat. The "foreign element" serves the purpose admirably. One can also understand this tendency in light of the desire to reaffirm the "healthy" image of Arab societies, ostensibly *free* from the "affliction" of Islamist violence, which, therefore, can only be transmitted from an outside world "contaminated" with such illnesses.

A careful comparison of external and internal influences on the development of Islamist violence, however, requires a certain distance from the motives that might explain, or justify, the attitudes of political and security officials and the official media, if only because academic scholarship has its own modes of operation, very different from those of the security forces. The official discourse of many Arab countries tends to *locate other Arab countries in that nebulous* area which officials so frequently term "foreign", and therefore consider responsible for the growth of religious terrorism in their own countries. This same discourse exculpates the official's own country from any responsibility in fostering terrorism and extremist violence elsewhere.

The prevalent official conception of the external dimension is, unfortunately, particularly facile. "Conspiratorial" and "hostile" elements, "inimical" to domestic tranquillity, provide the main focus of official understanding: an otherwise healthy local situation is "targeted", in their eyes, through the agency of violent Islamist groups. This conception, by definition, has no bearing on geographical realities or, indeed, on cultural differences. The external world in this context is impossible for the security and official apparatuses to pinpoint, which makes it difficult for them to *develop clear and constructive policies.*

The situation in the Egyptian case, however, has acquired new dimensions. The Egyptian campaign against what it terms the role of "external forces" in supporting Islamic violence has taken several directions. These forces now comprise Islamic conventions held abroad, Islamic publications appearing in European capitals, as well as the political asylum granted to a number of Islamist leaders, notably in England.

In recent months, Egypt has sharply criticised European policies in this respect. London, in particular, has been termed by the Egyptian authorities "the capital of international Islamist terrorism". In this context, the second aspect of the Egyptian campaign emerges. According to the official perspective, terrorists abroad have not simply found a secure base, at a safe remove from the Arab authorities' jurisdiction. They take advantage of the freedoms they enjoy in order *to formulate their "agenda" of terrorist* operations against political and economic targets in the Arab and Islamic worlds or in the West. As such, the Islamist leaders do not merit the political or humanitarian consideration of the European authorities. To the Arab officials, the only correct way of handling their case is as an international security issue.

Increasing Egyptian concern for the role of European countries and other external forces in supporting Islamist terrorism in Egypt may be attributed in part to the nature of the current confrontation between the Egyptian state and the Islamist terrorist groups. In spite of the decline in rates of fundamentalist violence in 1996, the previous year had seen a dramatic rise in terrorist operations abroad. These incidents occurred at a time when the Egyptian government, through the implementation of particularly severe measures, had succeeded in imposing reasonable tran*quillity on the domestic front, previously* characterised by violent confrontations. State authorities are now increasingly certain that the only true source of Islamist violence stems from elements in various countries who plan, finance and direct the activities of their recruits in Egypt. That a significant number of Islamist leaders have found refuge abroad poses a grave "threat" to national security in the eyes of the Egyptian authorities; their perceptions, in turn, make their anger and harsh words understandable.

There are local motives for this single-minded focus upon "external" factors. The state alleges that both the moderate Muslim Brotherhood and the radical Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Jihad receive foreign financing and merely implement plans and instructions issued from abroad. This is a prominent aspect of the state's campaign against the role of foreign elements purported to finance and plan terrorist activities. It has acquired particular significance in the context of the state's strategy to undermine the credibility of Islamist groups in Egyptian popular opinion.

The "foreign" element of the modern Islamist phenomenon in both its moderate and radical expressions is difficult to deny, particularly in light of the universalistic nature of Islamist ideology. *This theory, however,* does not explain the movement's origins, rapid development, and the tendency of some participants toward violence. Groups which resorted to violence existed in Arab and Islamic societies centuries ago, when there were no "external elements" to encourage or shelter them. In more practical terms, the alleged links between non-Arab countries *and the* groups that have perpetuated violence in the name of Islam in so many countries of the Arab world have only very rarely been substantiated.

Facile analyses which place the blame for Islamism on vague "external" forces, while overlooking the true causes that cause some Islamists to adopt violent tactics, must be discarded. This transition may be difficult because such analyses are now one of the cornerstones of official Arab "strategies" developed to combat Islamism in both its violent and moderate political functions. Refusing to make this transition, however, constitutes an attempt to evade the true domestic causes that have contributed to the Islamist trend and domestic Islamist violence and is only a way of putting off the necessary courageous and responsible measures.

The writer is managing editor of The State of Religion in Egypt, *a report published by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.*

Globalism and the MENA countries (1)

What is globalism?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed was invited last week to speak about 'Globalism and the MENA countries' in a seminar organised in Paris by the World Bank and the *Institut du Monde Arabe*. Here are excerpts of his paper on globalism

Globalism is still a phenomenon in the making. Entailing new forms of networking with ramifications encompassing the whole globe, it has developed at an ever-faster pace since the breakdown of the bipolar world order which was based, throughout the Cold War, on intractable an*tagonism between two hostile ideological blocs.* With the collapse of that structure, a major, not to say the main, impediment in the way of globalism was removed, and a new *global* system of reference began to take shape. This phenomenon developed at an accelerated pace thanks to two other phenomena, both growing out of the outstanding *achievements of science and technology in our age,* namely, the 'global village' and the acceleration of history syndromes respectively.

In the past, globalism was represented mainly by the United Nations, a global organisation whose fundamental unit is the sovereign state. However, the veto power wielded in the Security Council by *the five victors of World War II means that no res*olutions may be passed by the world organisation without the acceptance of the five states. This raises the question of how compatible the present structure of the United Nations is with the requirements of the new forms of globalism now still in the making. All the more so that the principle of *state sovereignty is no longer as inviolable as it* once was, not only because immunity against foreign intervention is undermined by many achievements of modern technology (satellite surveillance, for example, which is the monopoly of only a few), but also as a consequence of the globalisation of economic networks. In other words, the very founda*tions of the United Nations are now in question.*

A main reason for the crisis besetting the UN is that it is still dominated by an anachronistic structure inherited from World War II. It is impossible to talk of a new world order while the international organisation remains locked in a time warp, as it were, hostage to the post-World War II situation in *the post-Cold War situation.* Among the more glaring anomalies in this respect is the status of Germany and Japan, whose conspicuous absence from the Security Council reflects their defeat in a war fought over half a century ago, and takes no account of the fact that they have since become among the most economically successful states on *earth. Another anomaly relates to the status of Rus*sia, which simply, and without any legal justification, inherited the seat of the now defunct Soviet Union, one of the two superpowers of the bipolar world order. Even if such a pragmatic solution can be accepted temporarily, it cannot be sustained indefinitely.

Globalism is the new setting in which international relations are being restructured. There are *indications that Clinton's second term will be* marked by attempts to maintain America's position as the only dominant superpower at the global level, while other international groupings (the European Union; an eventual capitalist/communist bloc led by Japan, China and the Asian tigers in Asia; possibly even Russia) are all expected to *challenge America's global supremacy. Globalism* is also the setting in which the North-South confrontation will be played out and relations between today's great powers, notably the G-7, and other states will be determined.

Attesting to the lack of consistency in the present world system are the multiple forms that globalism *has acquired, with no clear definition of any of* these forms nor clear rules governing the relationships between them. Globalism today is assuming forms other than that of the United Nations, notably of an economic and informational character.

In the field of economics, global economic net*works are building up in a variety of expressions,* including multinational corporations and vast regional markets (the European Common Market; NAFTA; IPAC). One characteristic of economic globalism is to place economic interest, notably, the 'blind' mechanisms of maximising profit, above human interest, proceeding from the assump*tion that individual human interest can be achieved* merely by following the rules of market economy as codified in GATT.

The assumption is that markets are self-regulatory and that the freer they are, the more the human benefit derived, albeit in statistical terms and not on an individual basis. Indeed, no in*dividual businessman can claim to know whether* he personally will profit or not. But the business community as a collective whole can predict, with some degree of accuracy, whether market trends are promising or the opposite.

However, the assumption that markets can be beneficial to all is widely questioned in the Third *World, where many see the free interplay of market* forces as deepening discrepancies rather than levelling them out. In their eyes, markets are more likely to make the rich richer and the poor poorer than the opposite.

In the field of information and media technology, information superhighways are providing new opportunities for the removal of all types of barriers in the way of developing inter-human relations (of *a subjective nature), not only economic relations* (of an objective nature). No more do either time or space stand as obstacles in the way of immediate access to news, which is available to every individual through images and not only texts. Thanks to advances in audio-visual techniques, viewers can be transported to where the news is *breaking anywhere on the globe at any time of the* day or night, and feel they are personally involved in the unfolding of history anywhere Internet is a graphic illustration of the power of the new informational techniques.

However, the development of inter-active relations need not always be healthy. Present ac*complishments in computer science and tech*nology can blur the lines of demarcation between reality and virtual reality, which can take the form of a re-interpretation of reality according to the viewpoint and interests of the party providing the information. After all, what is regarded as objective reality is what is perceived as such by sub*jective observers. Individuals have no direct access* to objective facts without passing through the observations of subjective actors. The latter, if they master present-day information technology, can manipulate reality and present it in the manner they want it to be understood. Accordingly, those who hold the keys to sophisticated media technology in *the developed world can determine what 'reality'* is.

It follows that not everybody in the new globalist world is equal. Some are better placed than others when it comes to shaping what others must think and how they should behave. Moreover, every individual is pulled in two diametrically opposite directions. On the one hand, there is the pull towards the local, physical, inherited identity, deeply rooted in a given place and culture. On the other, there is what the British sociologist Anthony Giddens describes as *disembeddedness*, which is the pull towards a global reality, whether real or virtual, that nobody, even people living in the most remote corners of the globe, can escape from altogether. This new type of bipolarity is bound to affect the coming generations more and more deeply.

What theatre needs

By Naguib Mahfouz

While many public sector firms, including film production, may be privatised successfully, the theatre cannot survive without government support. There is a perennial danger that, if the theatre is forced to rely solely on its own resources, dramatic productions will fall far short of their mark. The theatre is the godfather of all the performing arts, and most successful troupes receive state support. The form of this support, however, may vary from one society to the other.

The elite in this country is responsible for reviewing the current condition of state theatre. The number of good performances has diminished markedly, which can only spell bad news for intellectual life. Bureaucracy is rampant in public sector theatre, and the staff's wages account for 75 per cent of production budgets. What can be done?

I believe that the state should maintain the National Theatre, which is a bastion of cultural life and must not be destroyed. Alongside the national troupe, two other troupes should be established, one to perform modern dramatic works and the other to specialise in experimental theatrical performances. Once that much has been accomplished, the state may — if it so wishes — refrain from direct involvement, but must continue to supervise the activities of the theatres where these troupes perform. Subsidising troupes which present quality performances, and offering substantial prizes, could also be useful areas for state involvement. Let it be said, however, that prizes must make a difference to the troupes' budgets, as opposed to the prizes currently awarded, which have only symbolic or moral rather than material value.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy

The Press This Week

US visit

Akhbar El-Yom: "Blind US support for Israel is nothing new. Since the Arabs cannot change this bias, it would be meaningless to link Arab-American relations to the US position on Israeli policies. But, at the same time, nothing would be wrong with Egypt doing its best to intensify its dialogue with US decision-*makers, in order to convince them of the folly of its* blind bias."
(Ibrahim Saada, 15 March)

October: "This time President Mubarak's visit to the US was different. The Middle East is on a hot tin roof and the situation lies in the crater of a volcano af*ter Netanyahu's efforts to undermine the* peace process. The US veto has encouraged him to continue along a path which will destroy peace. Anger swept the Arab and Islamic worlds over Israeli practices and US support for them. All these worries and challenges led President Mubarak to frankly and clearly sound the alarm from within the White House."
(Editorial, 16 March)

Al-Ahram: "President Mubarak's visit to Washington achieved several successes — the results of which were apparent before it ended. His success in putting the US administration on the defensive over its veto in the UN Security Council makes the Egyptian role in defending Palestinian and Arab causes more influential and effective."
(Editorial, 14 March)

Al-Shaab: "The official media says that there were two facets to President Mubarak's visit to Washington — *one political and one economic — and if the first* one failed, the second one was successful. I do not see how any sane person can say such a thing. If the unsuccessful facet means continuing US support for efforts to Judaise Jerusalem and humiliating the Arabs and the Muslims, as well as the continuation of the threat to attack Syria, how can the other facet be sincere US efforts to bolster Egypt's economy? The two facets of the visit are inevitably intertwined and if the political results are a catastrophe, then the economic results must be necessarily another catastrophe."
(Adel Hussein, 14 March)

Al-Mussawar: "President Mubarak gave the US president the best advice when he warned of the explosive situation and the possibility of the collapse of the peace process. He also stressed the importance Egypt attached to strengthening bilateral relations. I think that one of the most important achievements of Mubarak's visit is that he was able to put Egypt's differences with the US in their true context within the framework of a strong relationship which both sides seek to expand."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 14 March)

Al-Wafd: "What is important is that the meeting between the two presidents lasted for only 30 minutes. If they discussed all the issues pertaining to the peace process in detail, this means that three minutes were devoted to each. This is surely not enough for any definite results to be achieved on anything. Cairo must ask itself: what was achieved by Netanyahu's visit last week and the Washington visit this week? The results of both were negative."
(Magdi Mehanna, 13 March)

Al-Gomhuria: "Since peace has come to mean security rather than justice, and the US president is now guiding the peace process with arms held high over his head, it is high time for the Arabs to once again coordinate efforts and hold the second round of the extraordinary Arab summit in order to review their negotiating positions and use what pressure cards they hold — after they deluded themselves into thinking they could negotiate with only one pressure card — the White House — in their hands."
(Salah Eissa, 13 March)

Rose El-Youssef: "It is noteworthy that the US position always weakens before Israeli pressure exerted through the Jewish lobby. This requires concerted political and diplomatic efforts from the other side. President Mubarak has shown that he was able to confront such pressures to the fullest extent. The results of President Mubarak's efforts in Washington, notwithstanding Jewish influence, will soon be apparent."
(Mahmoud El-Tohamy, 17 March)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



King Hussein of Jordan, who cut short a state visit to Spain to return to Jordan after a Jordanian soldier opened fire on a group of Israeli school children, has been the centre of a flurry of activity this week. After the cancellation of a scheduled visit to the US, King Hussein travelled to Israel to pay condolences to the families of the soldier's victims.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Sink or drown

US commentator Thomas Friedman compared Netanyahu's policies on the peace process in the Middle East to a swimmer trying to cross a river but moving backwards, neither reaching the other bank nor remaining where he started — nobody can tell where he is trying to go, and nobody can tell his front from his back.

According to Friedman, Netanyahu has veered away from the Likud platform on which he was elected, which refused the return of any captured territory, including the West Bank. He went ahead with the Hebron agreement, accepted by a reasonable majority of Israelis, even though the agreement split the Likud Party. To satisfy the extremists in his party, he then veered in the opposite direction and decreed the construction of the Har Homa settlement, slamming the door to Jerusalem in the Palestinians' faces, confiscating identity cards to prevent Palestinians from entering the city, arousing their wrath and *destroying the faith of his* Arab interlocutors. Friedman suggested that Netanyahu should either renounce his past and go down in history as a great man, or elect not to choose and become a tragedy, going down in history as the man who drowned trying to swim across the river.

This analysis of the snarl in Israeli policy over the peace process applies not only to Netanyahu but to Peres as well — the man who wanted to win over the Israeli electorate and massacred innocent Lebanese civilians to do so, thus damaging the peace process and losing the elections. He will leave the political scene cursed by the Israelis who have grown to hate him, but also by those Arabs who trusted him, Arafat first among them. Peres's problem was that he deceived himself, the Israelis and the Arabs.

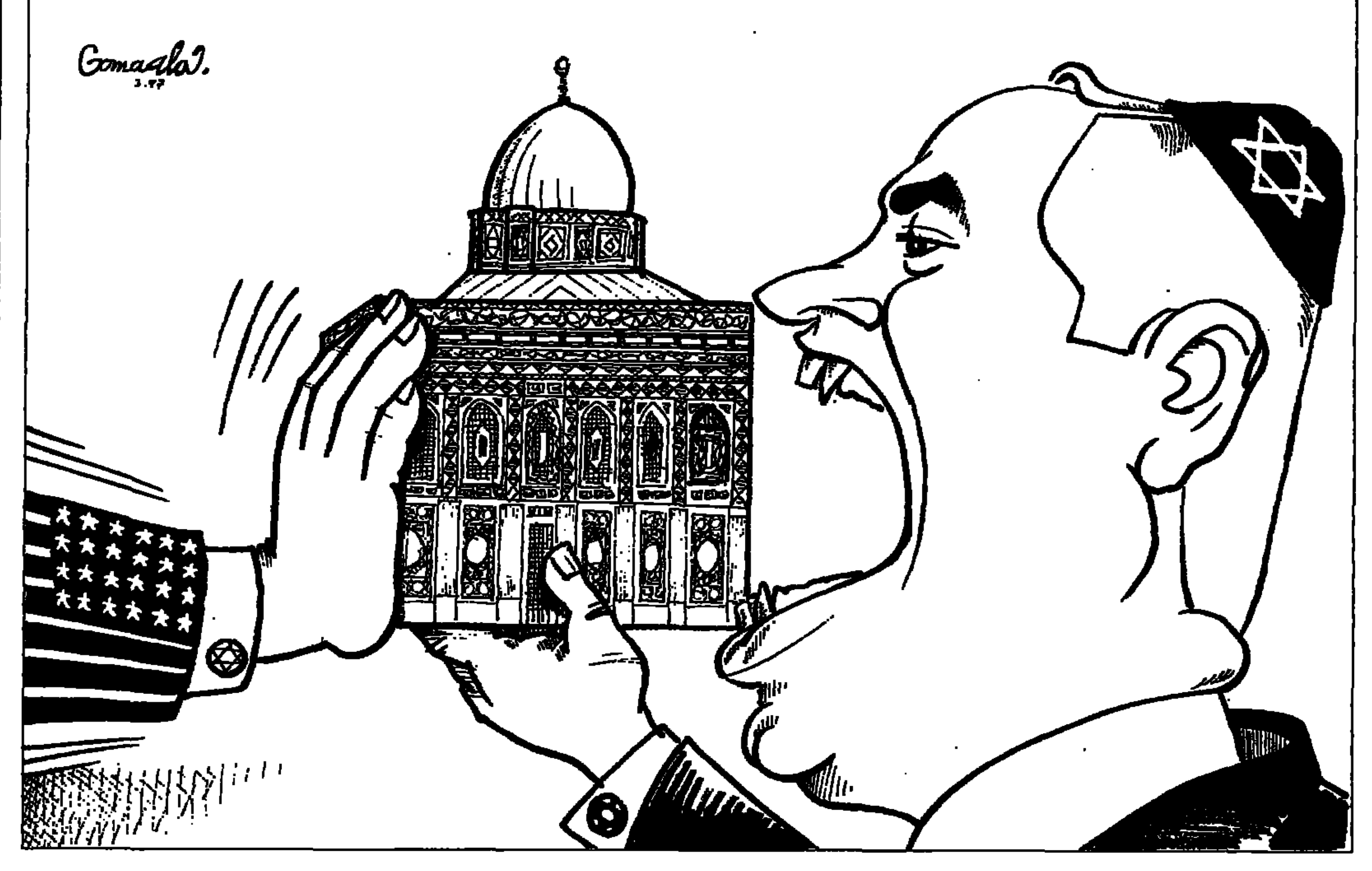
The US's pragmatic approach invented, planned and developed this self-contradictory policy. During his first term, Clinton attempted to exploit the foundations laid by the Bush administration, which James Baker had successfully used to establish the main lines of US policy as exemplified in the text of the Madrid conference.

This policy, for which the Clinton administration was in no way responsible, was notably successful in advancing the process as evidenced by the agreements of Oslo and Cairo, the Jordanian-Israeli agreement and the draft agreement with Syria. Despite Warren Christopher's innumerable shuttle trips, the Clinton administration never came up with any concrete suggestions to advance the *process or to eliminate any of* the obstacles. On the contrary, Clinton most often yielded to the pro-Israeli forces in Congress, because of the Republican majority in the Senate and the House, and agreed to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem. He was lavish in offering military aid to Israel and opposed the move to force Israel to abide by the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Contradictory US policies — backing the peace negotiations with the Palestinians and encouraging talks with Syria, on one hand, and re*fusing to take a firm stand on* Israeli procrastination over the Hebron agreement, the decision to open a tunnel under Al-Aqsa Mosque and the extension of settlements, on the other — were pushed through with the help of the veto in the face of unprecedented international condemnation of Israel.

Contradictory tendencies — the wish to push on with the peace process and put the pressure on the Arabs to carry on negotiating, set against the refusal to put any pressure on the Israelis and the insistence on vetoing any Israeli condemnation — leave no doubt that Clinton's policy in the Middle East is bound to sink and drown. It is already doomed, as is Netanyahu.

The dilemma facing Washington is that it is doing all it can to maintain its monopoly over the peace process and impose its presence as a partner *keen on peace in the Middle East*. Its continued and constant support of Israel and its inability to take impartial stands, however, oblige it instead to withdraw from its previous positions and commitments. This is what will defeat US policy, and will bind Clinton and Netanyahu's fates as two people who were unable to read history and make the correct choice.



Soapbox

No more 'no war, no peace'

After his return from the United States, where he renewed Israel's strategic security alliance with the US, Netanyahu sought to cover up his decision to redeploy the troops in Hebron. The settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem: another strategic settlement fragmenting the West Bank, a territory which today resembles a block of Gruyère.

Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority read Netanyahu's decision as a manoeuvre aimed to appease the Israeli public and defy the Arab world. Netanyahu's aim, however, is simply to cement his own position at the head of the Israeli government for another four years. The Palestinian legislative assembly condemned Israel's settlement plan and ruled out any further negotiations with the current Israeli government. Chairman Arafat brought the case to the Arab League. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council's resolution on Israel's policies in Jerusalem was aborted by the US veto. In response to Arafat's request, President Mubarak agreed with King Hassan of Morocco to convene the Jerusalem Committee later this month.

Netanyahu today must choose to continue flouting international law, or to reverse his decision on the settlement. The no war, no peace policy is no longer acceptable to the world community, which anticipates a just and comprehensive peace.

Finally, the forces in Israel which claim to be committed to peace are responsible for blocking Netanyahu's policies through all effective means. Otherwise, it will be clear that Labour and Likud have identical goals, although their means may differ.



This week's Soapbox speaker is assistant secretary-general of the Arab League and director of the General Department for Palestinian Affairs.

Said Kamal

Lost in America

During his visit to the US, writes **Edward Said**, Yasser Arafat came across as a manipulated petitioner, *incapable of understanding the context of his presence, and heedless of the concessions that had brought him there*

I have just spent the last two days reading the manuscript of Raja Shehadeh's devastatingly sad and powerful new book *From Occupation to Interim Accords*, which, thanks to a Dutch publisher, is soon to appear in print. Shehadeh himself is a remarkable man, unusual for the care and deliberation of what he says and writes, courageous and modest in manner, serious and without illusion. *Raja was educated in literature* at the American University in Beirut, a fact that has always given a literary dimension to what he writes, especially in his diary of life (*sumud*) under a brutal military occupation. He did his law studies in England, then returned to the West Bank in the 1970s both to join the family law firm and to become one of the founders of Al-Haq, to this day the most credible and well-considered of the Palestinian human rights organisations.

Carried out *in a clear, analytic style without exaggeration* or bombast, Al-Haq's studies, including Raja's own analysis of the system of laws imposed by the military and civil authorities entitled *Occupier's Law*, stand as ineradicable records of Israel's systematic strategy for controlling the Palestinian territories for a very long time. I recall several discussions with him about this during the 1980s when he lamented the fact that the PLO didn't seem to understand that the Israelis were not just passing laws here and there but were operating with a plan and a vision for bringing these territories — which they clearly never planned to give up — under the rule of law for their purposes. He was the first, I think, to understand the legalistic character of Israeli thinking, and he remains a member of that small minority of Palestinians who always try to grasp the over-all structure of domination that gives Israeli thinking about Palestinians and their land its coherence and power.

Shehadeh's book is, as he says, a kind of unhappy postmortem *of what happened from the Washington talks un*til the present, in which he documents in great detail the concessions and the massive inattentiveness and incompetence of what the Palestinians were doing; this, as he makes clear at every juncture, is in absolute contrast with the Israelis, who used the negotiations according to carefully prepared plans to consolidate their hold on the territories and by no means to concede sovereignty or self-determination to the Palestinians. "Peace" in this context was a very misleading word. What the Palestinians seem never to have grasped was the nature of the Israeli context, the schemes, legal manoeuvres, and meticulously prepared negotiating tactics that drove them forward, first in Washington and then, much more seriously, in Oslo. In order to have understood this context, the Palestinian leadership would have had to study Israel carefully, understand the dynamics of its politics and ideological commitments, and take a much more active and demanding position vis-à-vis the Israeli negotiators. Instead, as Shehadeh shows in painstaking detail, they were always anxious to show the Israelis that they were willing *to concede major Palestinian positions on, for instance*, settlements and Jerusalem, just to prove to the Israelis that they would make willing partners. On one occasion in 1993, in order to test Palestinian intentions, Rabin submitted 50 questions to the Palestinians, all of which were answered positively by Arafat and Abu Mazen. Even Rabin was surprised at their answers, and more surprised still when it was clear that the Palestinians never asked questions of the Israelis, never challenged them, never effectively probed their intentions.

Precisely the same situation obtains today between the Palestinian Authority and the Americans. Arafat came on a so-called state visit to the US during which he saw President Clinton, Madeleine Albright, and a few members of Congress in Washington; after that he came to the UN for a reception, a meeting with Jewish leaders, in addition to a speech at the Council of Foreign Relations, and then visits to George Bush in Texas and Jimmy Carter in Atlanta. Of course he seemed generally delighted *to be welcomed to the United States on his own, to be* treated by government and media with elaborate courtesy, and to be the centre of attention. Beyond that, both he and his entourage seemed oblivious to the political and intellectual context in which they were being manipulated by the Americans. Clinton made one statement, just one, indicating his displeasure with the Israeli announcement that a new settlement was going to be constructed in Jebel Abu Ghneim; the State Department spokesman made one statement criticising Israel's intention to close down four Jerusalem offices that were allegedly "political". And that was it. At exactly the same time, Arafat's *delegate* in the United Nations was putting forth a Security Council resolution that had the unanimous consent of the members and in which Israel was condemned for Jebel Abu Ghneim; the Americans made it absolutely clear to the PLO that if the resolution came to a vote they would veto it, which of course they did.

Moreover Arafat seemed uncomprehending, or at least unaware, of how gently he was being treated by the media which a very short time ago had compared him, as a "*mass murderer of innocent Jews*", *with Hitler and Stalin*. He appeared on an evening talk show with one Larry King, a devoted Likud Zionist, who asked him questions about his *kuffiyeh* and whether there was democracy of the press and other freedoms in the Palestinian territories; "yes", answered Arafat shamelessly, we have a full democracy, which King clearly knew was a lie but which he passed over so as to spare Arafat the disgrace of exposure. Never once in all his media appearances did Arafat say a word about the sufferings of his people, or about 1948, or about the closures, or the 5,000 prisoners still held by Israel. He was a creature of a context he neither understood nor tried to change: for in fact Arafat was in America not to advance the cause of his people but rather to play a small role in American politics as a reformed terrorist who was here to testify to the power and goodness of America, and to further the cause of American interests in his part of the world. He seemed to have no consciousness at all of the fact that his pos*turings as a military commander or as a major political* actor were tolerated because, in the American political context — which did not give him much in the way of promised money — he had already conceded his people's aspirations to be free and to have real self-determination. This was the price he had paid to be treated with respect by Clinton and Albright. In the American context, he was only a local enforcer of the peace that Israel and the US had imposed on him, a peace which, as Raja Shehadeh's work very clearly shows, is a consolidation of Israel's territorial gains in Gaza and the West Bank. His submission was apparent in the colourless language he and his various assistants used (it was sad to see the gifted and brilliant Hanan Ashrawi reduced to the status of his translator and linguistic helper).

The worst thing of all during his American visit was that Arafat seemed to have no idea who his real supporters were, the African-Americans, the students and professors, the various Arab-American organisations who have defended Palestinian self-determination for years in this country against extremely difficult odds. He paid no *attention to any of these, contenting himself, at a large* and expensively pointless UN reception, with shaking a lot of anonymous hands. In the American context he was no longer a fighter for his people's rights, but a curiosity that made a series of appearances and then left. This, I believe, is an extremely reckless way to behave for someone who represents himself as the head of a nascent Palestinian state. He has to come here as someone who knows and makes others aware of how much damage the US has done to his people, to challenge Americans, to ask difficult questions, to enter into the life of this country not as a mindless petitioner, but as the representative of a cause and a people which the US and Israel have done everything to destroy. But, as Raja Shehadeh concludes, it may be too late for us. So long as the present Palestinian leadership remains, we shall lose more and more and, alas, our leaders will appear more pacified, tame, and uncomprehending than ever.

And yet there are signs here and there among the *Palestinian people that the leadership's attitude is not* theirs. The popular attempts to prevent further building of Israeli settlements is one such sign, and there will soon be others as Arafat's tyranny against his long-suffering people increases.

Arrogance under Oslo's umbrella

As the colonial nature of Israeli occupation becomes clearer, writes **Tikva Honig-Parnass**, it becomes increasingly obvious that Netanyahu's bulldozers are only the heirs to Rabin's policies

Jordanian King Hussein's *visit to the grieving families* of the seven girls killed by a Jordanian soldier was unprecedented, considering that 268 Palestinian children *were killed by Israeli soldiers during the course of the In*tifada, without the Israel head of state so much as sending condolences. Indeed, the King's operation managed to reap some tasty fruit. His visit helped him to relieve the tension between himself and the Israeli Prime Minister, and brought Jordan into the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as a central player — there mainly to help Israel "pull its chestnuts out of the fire".

In fact, his visit lent legitimacy to Israel and its annexationist *settlement* policies, despite his declared opposition to the building of a settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim and his criticism of the minuscule scope of the first further redeployment, scheduled to take place as soon as the Palestinian Authority (PA) agrees to re-enter talks with Israel.

What is now taking place is no more than bargaining over the payment the Palestinians are to receive for resuming the negotiations and restraining the wave of mass protest which Israel fears will break out as soon as the bulldozers appear *on Jebel Abu Ghneim. As these words* are being written (18 March), Arafat is still not willing to accept the "package of gestures" that Israel is offering — all of which the Palestinians are entitled to anyway, under the terms of the Oslo Accords (these "gestures" include the right of Arafat, his family and close aides to take off from Deheniya Airport in Gaza without an Israeli security check, an increase in the volume of vehicular traffic allowed to use the "safe passage" between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — which is not yet in operation, expediting negotiations over the construction of the Gaza seaport — and building 400 housing units for Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

The 6,500 housing units for the settlement of Har Homa on Jebel Abu Ghneim in the Bethlehem District, on Jerusalem's southern border (annexed in 1967) are not just another settlement. To understand the supreme importance which Israel attributes to this decision, one has to look at the recent settlement activity in the areas to the east of Jerusalem, namely: the recent expulsion operation carried out against the Jahalin Bedouin tribe, in order to carry out the plan initiated by the Rabin-Peres government to building 1,500 new housing units in the settlement of Maale Adumim; and the confiscation of thousands of dunams to create territorial continuity between the latter and Jerusalem. These measures are part of a plan which Israel feels the need to implement as quickly as possible, as it will determine the face of the final settlement: to extend the borders of Jerusalem, so that when the final *status talks begin in 1998, the status of Je*rusalem will already have been determined by the building projects, of which the establishment of Har Homa and the expansion of Maale Adumim are only two of the key components.

Israel will bring to the negotiating table thousands of newly-confiscated dunams populated by Jewish Israelis and a *solid Jewish* majority in the city with which to justify its perpetual sovereignty in Jerusalem. These projects also aim at completing the ring of settlements around Jerusalem, thus cutting off Palestinians in other parts of the West Bank from Jerusalem and deepening the already-existing cleavage between the north and south of the West Bank — travel between them has become more and more difficult since 1993, when most Palestinians were forbidden from entering or even driving through Jerusalem.

As the final status talks approach, Israel will make efforts to enlarge the Israeli settlement islands as it withdraws from Palestinian territory, thus ensuring that the maximum amount of territory remains under direct Israeli control. Israel is now feverishly confiscating thousands and thousands of extra dunams for the construction of bypass and security roads, and thickening the settlements.

This helps us understand why Israel finds it so crucial *to transfer as little territory as possible to the Palestinians* in the three scheduled redeployments of the interim period, not only from Area C where Israel has complete control (now about 70 per cent of the West Bank), but also from Area B, where the PA has civil authorities while the Israeli military still patrols the security arteries. The continued existence of a military administration in Area B enables the speedy confiscation of lands — by means of an order from the Central Command declaring an area a closed military zone — as happened in Hebron this month, near Kiryat Arba, in order to build a "security road" for the settlement.

The Oslo Accords contain no clauses which explicitly forbid the construction or expansion of settlements, nor the confiscation of land to build roads, nor house demolition orders (700 houses throughout the West Bank are scheduled for demolition in the near future). The only specific reference to construction is actually directed against the Palestinians: "The Palestinian side shall ensure that no construction close to the settlements and military locations will harm, damage or adversely affect them or the infrastructure serving them." (Interim Agreement, Annex 3, Article 27).

The Palestinian claim that the planned settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) and elsewhere violate the Oslo Accords relies on an ambiguous clause which declares the commitment of the two sides to "view the West Bank and Gaza strip as a single territorial unit, the integrity and status of which will be preserved in the interim period." *In fact, this proviso does not make clear* whether it refers only to "safe passage" between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (which has not yet been implemented) or to continuity between the various patches of Palestinian population *within* the West Bank as well.

It is difficult to see how the Palestinian interpretation of the "integrity" of the West Bank can be reconciled with one of the *fundamental* approaches inherent in the Oslo Accords: building a political process based on the gradual, phased transfer of territory while delaying any resolution of the most difficult problems — the settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, borders — to the final settlement. The assumption which underlay the gradualist approach was, on the one hand, that with the passage of time any opposition to the Oslo Accords would be repressed, and on the other hand that a process of "normalisation" between Israel and the Arab countries would be well underway — to serve as an additional factor pressuring the Palestinians to accept Israel's disastrous conditions for the final settlement. The gradual, phased approach also, of course, gives Israel additional time in which to "create the facts on the ground" [read: additional land confiscations for roads and settlements] which will dictate the map of the final settlement and force the Palestinians to agree to it.

As shown by the difficulties entailed by the Hebron *agreement, however, and now concerning* Jabel Abu Ghneim and the first additional redeployment, the assumption that it would be possible to attain "industrial quiet" has already been disproved. What is important to note is that it is precisely the gradualist approach which has disproved it, not any essential changes of the Rabin-Peres policy allegedly made by Netanyahu.

The Rabin-Peres government implemented a comprehensive plan of settlement construction and expansion, and even initiated the decisions to build the Har Homa settlement and expand Maale Adumim. The difference between the previous and the present government is mainly one of style, as M K Yosef Beilin himself (who initiated the well-known agreement with Abu Mazen, which would leave the majority of settlements in place, and which would turn the village of Abu Dis, to be renamed Al-Quds, into the capital of the Palestinian state) asserts. In Beilin's words: "I am in favour of building everywhere in Jerusalem, including the building of Har Homa; the question is one of timing and clever tactics. We [the Rabin government] increased settlements by 50 per cent, we built in Judea and Samaria [sic — the West Bank], but we did it quietly and with wisdom. You [the Netanyahu government] proclaim your intentions every morning, frighten the Palestinians and transform the topic of Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel — a matter which all Israelis agreed upon — into a subject of world-wide debate. The main thing is to get the Palestinians to agree *that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Without their* agreeing to this, there will be no agreement." (Televised round-table, 17/3/97). That is indeed the essence of the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement. Similarly, Peres stated: "We proved that it is possible to build Jerusalem without any objection." (Television interview, 12/3/97).

As stated above, the postponement of the most difficult *problems to the final status stage planted* a time-bomb which will make advance towards a final settlement difficult in any case. It is true that the time lapse between the signing of the Oslo Accords and the final settlement has enabled a broad pro-Oslo camp to be built in Israeli society — more than just a majority, a consensus which includes portions of the Likud and the nationalist-religious right as well. On the other hand, this consensus is also based on the true spirit of Oslo — direct Israeli control over the maximum possible territory within the framework of a single apartheid regime stretching from the Jordan River to the sea. It is this logic which is largely responsible for the difference in style between the present Likud government and that of its predecessor. This is because the closer we get to the "moment of truth" when the substantive portions of Oslo must be implemented, the harder it will be to maintain the facade of "equitable" rules of the game as formulated by the Rabin-Peres government: "consultations" and "reaching *agreements" with the PA on steps that Israel takes*. Hence, Israel knew that it did not even have to discuss the recent sad joke of the 9 per cent redeployment proposal. When chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat asked, in a meeting with two of Netanyahu's top aides, that the PA be included in the discussions on the scope of the redeployment, he was told there was nothing to discuss, because Israel would not change its position.

The disclosure of the colonial nature of the situation reached a new peak of clarity recently when Israel not only imposed its diktats, but also took steps to prevent the Palestinians from taking legitimate measures in response: the latest instance was the international conference in Gaza, at which the PA attempted to arouse world public opinion, and now the possibility of popular Palestinian resistance to Har Homa. Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi threatened, in an unprecedentedly intimidating tone, that if Arafat did not prevent the expression of protest by the Palestinian masses (which Hanegbi classifies as "terrorism"), then he should remember that "he and his wife Suha can be expelled from Gaza, and go back to being nomads wandering from Iraq to Tunisia." Even the "moderate" Foreign Minister, David Levy, accused the Palestinians of risking the termination of the political process by "threatening to make crises every day and every night, and weeping and moaning all the time."

Today, when the bulldozers and surveyors have started to work on Jebel Abu Ghneim, the PA is still doing everything to keep mass protest under restraint. But will *they succeed? Can they?*

The writer is head of the Jerusalem-based Alternative Information Centre.

Galas and graveyards

David Blake on birthdays, pianos and pachyderms

The Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra celebrating its fifth anniversary; conductor Sherif Mohieddin; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 14 March

Almost everyone came. Friends, friends of friends and others not so benevolent. The Cairo musical world was in attendance. The Akhenaten has survived. It began in dark days. Its director, Sherif Mohieddin, understood from the beginning that orchestras need money, people to admire them and publicity to keep it all going. He has done his best. Such a director, for all this, must have entrepreneurial as well as musical gifts to keep the show on the road.

The Akhenaten therefore has had some raw deals, but the orchestra has kept going. Mohieddin will be there, wherever, and will play. He prefers contemporary music but because of his special place as keeper of one of the flames of musical Cairo, the classics have to occupy the lion's share. Musical tastes have altered. The net and cyberspace are with us to stay. They have changed the musical scene in all centres where musical things matter. Sherif Mohieddin therefore has a double or triple role. A classical formula must be maintained alongside new aspects if he is to be the young conductor of the future.

Added to this is the new problem that the orchestra has been enlarged and will be presenting first performances of modern Egyptian music. The plan is fully set out, but will it appeal to audiences? The Akhenaten's future is moving out into riskier places where a sell-out would help the orchestra better than what haunts the musical scene — a few rows of zealots, half of whom have been invited. Cairo passionately needs a young, contemporary-oriented public. Without it, the graveyard looms.

The fifth birthday party was devoted to Mozart.

So Mozart is immortal, never dies, and fits everything from bashes to busts. But a selection from the *Marriage of Figaro*, *Cosi Fan Tutte* and *The Magic Flute* for the singers, Cairo's best no doubt, has worn a bit thin. We needed a little variety or something new. Two orchestral pieces opened the festival: The *Symphony No. 29 K 201* and the *Symphony Concertante in E flat K 364* with Wolfgang Marschner violin, Mahmoud Othman viola. The symphony showed us the orchestra in its present state. It looks larger, but in these proceedings it did not sound so. For the entire evening it played well. Clear, almost to fine-spun, but bloodless and without facets. So we sailed nicely along in a pleasant shiny sort of limbo, with no grandeur or force. So — "joli Mozart" appeared on the scene to haunt the ball. Refined Mozart is so difficult to listen to it has almost expired. How come the Akhenaten have attempted an exhumation?

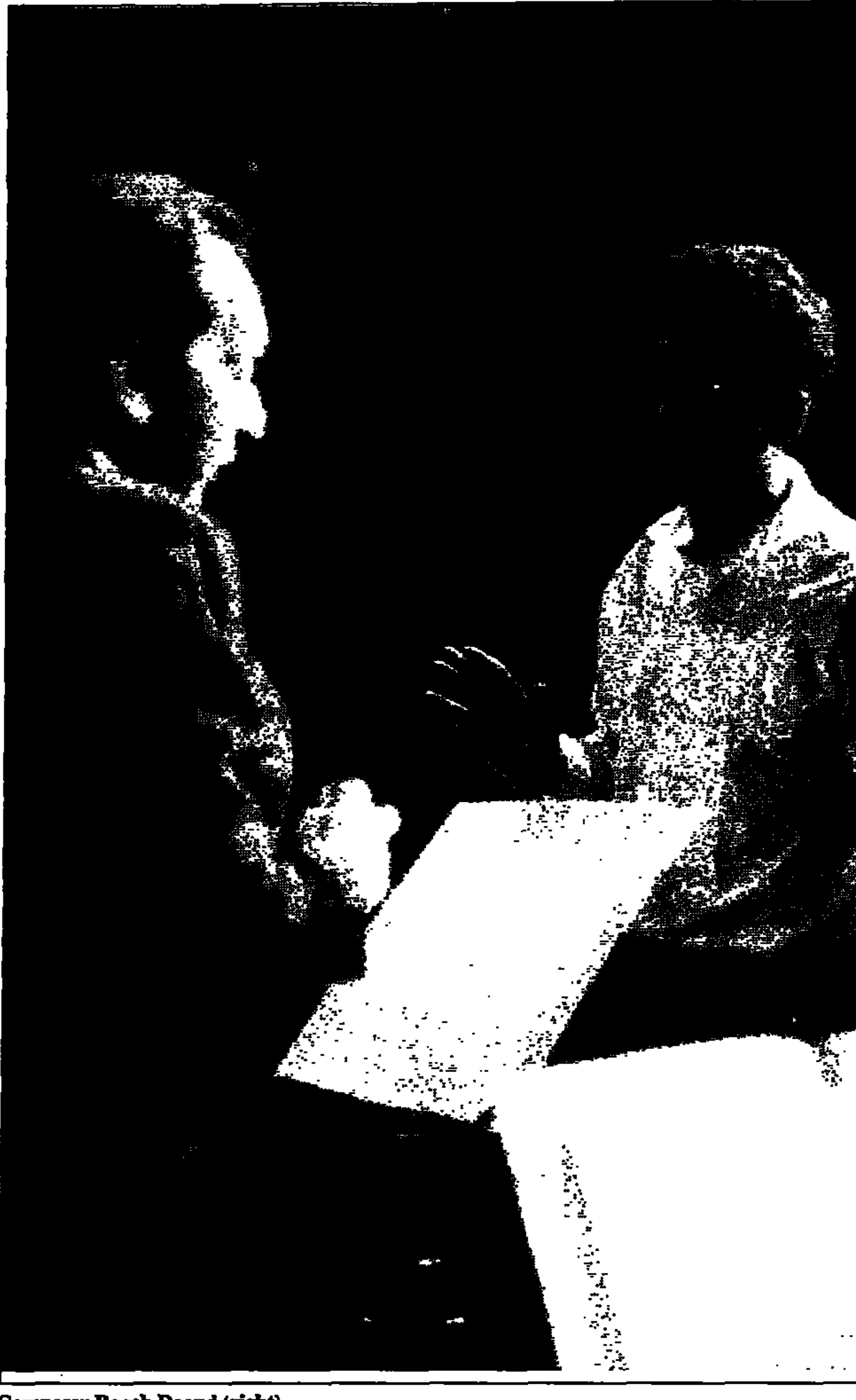
The two soloists were not quite into this mix. They played out valiantly, but "dolce" was the word. Mohieddin can do better than this.

Came the operatic pieces — and the singers from *Cosi*, tenor Mohamed Abu El-Kheir, baritone Raouf Zeidan and Ashraf Sweilam's bass as Don Alfonso. In the macho trio, if the title is *Cosi Fan Tutte*, and it is women's weaknesses which are under scrutiny, what about the men, what about these three male roles: cynical, manipulative, dishonest and proud of it, and there's worse to come. The three singers were splendid. Words clear as the characters are not, sadly, for the unfortunate women. What a gang. Happy Neapolitan holidays.

Next — Hannan El-Guindi sang Cherubino's shorter aria. She was fine, but the speed was not. Too nervy and to quick, never allowing her to phrase it with her lovely voice. Then Nevine Allouba as Mozart's countess, doing her sad, difficult song: *Dove sono* — where is my Rosenkavalier? She sounded notably miserable and disenchanted.

Ratiba El-Hefni, making a surprise appearance at the party, sang *Deh vieni non tardar*. In the duet of the Papageno story, El-Hefni and Raouf Zeidan gave what was the most successful piece of the night. Then came the quintet from *The Magic Flute*. The singers were untouched by the corporate, suburban Mozart being squeezed into respectability. They gave colour and humour.

Last, Ramzy Yassa, in the K major *A 188 piano concerto*. Then came the real trouble. Yassa is a great pianist, his tones and his outlook illuminate Beethoven, Busoni, Wagner and Liszt. His fingers are perfect. He achieves miracles with octaves and in the big gestures of Liszt. What was he doing with this Mozart? It was expected he would energise the entire proceedings. Through the three movements the mood was flat, almost empty. He even seemed tentative. Where was the irony and definite clarity of Mozart and of Yassa himself? Does he dislike this concerto? It certainly did not suit him. The Mozart of 1997 had got lost in taffeta curtains. And the celebration had come to an end. Very long, very nice, but it could have done with a bit of the madness and valour Moushira Issa showed in her exciting concert of a few nights previously. Buckets of notes for the Mozart — very little content. A gala — somewhat.



Composer Rageh Daoud (right)

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Berlin Concert Choir; Brahms VII; conductor Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 15 March

In pianist-land, if you want a good time, follow the elephants. Not to the graveyards but to the dancing ground. Elephants love a good dance and tread lightly.

For this concert there is an elephant coming up on the horizon, but before it arrives we must deal with R Daoud's *Little Suite for Large String Orchestra*. He is one of Egypt's best young composers. What he does is worth hearing. This suite is in sections, yet closely knit.

It opens darkly — deep, rich and earthy. Something new. The sounds are not threatening but impressive. Over the music hover small filament-like threads. Night moths floating out like the tentacles of a sea medusa palpitating from the deeps of an ocean... It is dramatic but not noisy, dim but lit from within. Some sort of big climax is expected which never comes, and so the piece goes on and out of our vision. It is well-written — no padding and full of character. A tom-tom sounds far away and muffled. Is it Africa? Maybe the steps of the elephant are contained in the big Tchaikovsky *piano concerto in B flat minor* which awaits us. The composer wrote and dedicated this to Hans Von Bulow. He gave it its first performance ever in the US. History has asked how Von Bulow played this elephant because he had small tiny hands. It seems to need hands the size and weight of a hangman — Rakhmaninov.

Every pianist dreams of coping with the elephantine *B flat minor*. They commit suicide to succeed with it. If you do your name is made forever. Now the days of Van Cliburn and his histrionic approach are past. The elephant has gone into space fiction, yet people do listen to it and adore it.

From the beginning, it was obvious something strange and wonderful was taking place. The new elephant-tamer, Daniel Pollock, is very tall, and like most tall people has a way of looking down on everything without the slightest condescension. He did not play up to his audience. Nothing to exaggerate the drama of the piece. He merely played it. And what a player.

Does one say player of these people? He simply, without the slightest physical effort or vanity, played it. As the first movement flashed on the immensity, the thing we were all waiting for, was so matter-of-fact. He even lowered the tension. Then the big chords and the flat hands move into action like a call to order. And the movement was over.

The slow Russian tune was also given flat. No nostalgia. Something new at work, but never obvious. He's not a virtuoso, does not rely on tone flood. The great old concerto still has something new for searchers. You have little time to resist him. The man plays with real human hands and he keeps his trousers on. The finish found him and the elephant completely together. They will dance this strange ritual in other places. The pianistic species never dies and so can continue forever with the old *B flat minor*.

The end of this concert was the Berlin Concert Choir. If this is the way they perform, they must be everyone's favourite choir. This choir is intimate, tender, loveable and all are artists.

They and the orchestra under El-Saedi gave a Brahms festival celebrating his anniversary. The *Schicksalied* of op 54 and the songs of op 82 called for celestial sopranos. We heard them. Angels aloft. The concert was musically a joy.

Theatre

Mission impossible

Nehad Selaiha watches as Walid Aouni threads his way through the alluring *Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam* at Al-Gomhuria Theatre

As I sat in the sparsely occupied auditorium of Al-Gomhuria Theatre last week, on two successive nights, watching Walid Aouni's impassioned tribute to Shadi Abdel-Salam — that richly gifted artist and film director who despite, or, perhaps, because of his tragically premature death has become something of a myth — I could not help thinking that there comes a time in the life of all genuine artists when they have to pause, take a long, honest look at the path they have traversed so far and ask themselves the excruciating question: where to and what next?

Ironically, this time never arrives before the artist has reached intellectual and aesthetic maturity, mastered his craft, and developed that elusive, intangible, but nonetheless very real thing called a style of his or her own. Over the years, and against great odds, Aouni — the pioneer of modern dance theatre in the Arab world par excellence — has evolved a style of production at once richly sensuous — even flamboyantly so — and ardently spiritual, and a composite, dazzling visual vocabulary drawn from a variety of cultural sources and intricately interwoven. His choice of music too displayed a similar eclectic tendency. This curious cultural pot pourri, together with his mode of composition which, at its best, as in *The Fall of Icarus* (1993), *The Excavations of Agatha* (1993), or *Elephants Hide to Die* (1996), appropriates the strategies and techniques of poetry and music and relies on metaphor and paradox as structural tools, has intrigued some, baffled others and frustrated many. Few could deny the riveting beauty and evocative power of the images he projected on stage. But the internal logic of his unsettling combinations of discordant elements was not always easy to grasp. Aouni provided some clues and hinted at frames of reference, but the demands his best productions made on the imagination of the audience were many and disturbingly unfamiliar.

It did not help, of course, that modern dance itself was practically unknown to the majority of Egyptian audiences. As early as 1933 John Martin had defined modern dance as "the expression, by means of bodily movement arranged in significant form, of concepts which transcend the individual's power to express by rational and intellectual means". Nevertheless, people continued to ask Aouni to define verbally what he 'meant'. In the heated critical controversy that surrounded his early work in Egypt he was accused, among other things, of muddle-headedness and a facile hankering after the strange and exotic for its own sake. Few, however, were sufficiently perceptive to realise that although the apparent fragmentariness and absence of a clear sequential narrative in these works points in a modernist direction, their total emotional and imaginative thrust bespeak a clear romantic quest for the validation of an intensely personal vision: a thirst for wholeness, belonging and, above all, a sense of continuity with the past. This explains, perhaps, Aouni's choice of themes — his fascination with myth and ritual, the lives of artists and the legacy of the Pharaohs.

How long can an artist, already burdened with a deep sense of alienation, tolerate the animosity of an uncomprehending audience and the loneliness that comes with it? Predictably and, perhaps, inevitably, Aouni began to waver. I am not using the word pejoratively to mean that he sacrificed his artistic integrity to win the audience. He simply made his art more accessible by treading more familiar ground and providing clear narrative lines. In *Coma* (1995), based on the works of Naguib Mahfouz and sparked off by the criminal attempt on his life, *The Last Interview* (1996), based on the life and works of the painter Tahiya Halim, and, finally, in *The Desert of Shadi Abdel-Salam*, few could complain of not 'understanding', and for those language was used as an extra aid to understanding.

No one could quarrel with Aouni's choice of material for this last work. The artistic world of Shadi Abdel-Salam, his personality, and the quality of his imagination and response to life can be a wonderful source of inspiration for any artist. In handling this material, however, Aouni set himself the impossible task of reproducing on stage, in the third part of the work, Abdel-Salam's inimitable film, *Al-Mumia*. This does not mean that there were not some ingenious touches and solutions — like the haunting music and back projections, the addition of the figure of death in the form of a seductive succubus with a mummified head, and the use of the orchestra pit as a tomb. But Abdel-Salam's *Al-Mumia* is such a perfectly finished artistic product that to use it as material one has to break free of its spell and put it at a safe distance. I doubt if anybody can do this. What happened in this part of the production was that one kept remembering the film and comparing it to what was happening on stage, and the comparison was definitely not in Aouni's favour.

He was on much safer grounds with *The Chair of Tutankhamen*, the documentary film on which he based the first part, and *The Eloquent Peasant* (Abdel-Salam's film version of a famous ancient papyrus) which formed the basis of the second part. Indeed, these two parts of the performance formed a self-contained unit. Here, Aouni succeeded in establishing a dialogue with his material, looking beyond the films to embody in simple, vivid images of striking clarity and economy, the process of their creation. In both, the presence of Shadi Abdel-Salam (performed by the gifted dancer Mohamed Shafiq) was at once ethereal, emphatic and arresting. Even those who had never set eyes on the great film director felt as if they intimately knew the inner workings of his soul and mind. There were no concessions here, no frills, dazzling embellishments or redundancies, but a meticulous attention to form and structure and great austerity in the choice of colour, sound and movement. Perhaps a similar approach would have saved the third part.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Dina El-Gharib and Mohamed Abdel-Moneim (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 22 March.

The Other Half of the Sky
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5723. Until 25 March.
Featuring works by Renata de Mattia (engravings), Lidia Costantini (photographs) and Fadia Badrawi (multi-media).

Collective Exhibition
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 25 March.
Sheikh Ramadan Abuy Sueleim, Hassan El-Shark, Sayed Fayed and Salah Hassouna.

The Moulid Lovers and The Bride's Chest
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. 23-26 March.

Peggy Crawford (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 27 March.
Photographs of Yemeni traditional architecture.

Ezzeddin Nagulb
Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 28 March.

Three Contemporary Visions
Khan El-Magkraby, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 29 March.
Sabri Mansour, Said Hedaya and Salem Salah.

Mohamed El-Gabri (Mixed Media)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 March.

Gathering
Cairo Atelier, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri mornings, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 March.
Featuring works by 15 artists.

Spring (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 March.
Group exhibition.

Salah Enani's Cinematica (Paintings)
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. el 354 7951. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 March.

Egyptian Features (Paintings)
Risah Gallery, 6 El-Gezira El-Wosta St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9994. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 March.

Domestic Architecture In Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm, Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

FILMS

The Three Undelivered Letters
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3. 20 March, 6pm.

Aguirre, Der Zorn Gottes
Goethe Institute, 5 El-Bustan St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 20 March, 6.30pm.
Directed by Werner Herzog (1972), the last of the New German Film series.

German Film Directors in US-Emigration
Goethe Institute, as above.
24 March, 6pm: The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1939) directed Wilhelm Dieterle.
25 March, 6pm: Manhunt (1941) directed by Fritz Lang.
26 March, 6pm: The Spiral Staircase (1945) directed by Robert Siodmak.

Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 20 March, 7pm & Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 26 March, 7pm.
Directed by Luis Bunuel (1972)

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

22 March, 7pm: Deserto Rosso, directed by M Antonioni (1964).
23 March, 7pm: Salvatore Giuliano, directed by F Rosi (1961).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hallaq Housh
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hassan El-Lol
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman At The Top)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Tin Cup
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. New Odeon II, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Hunchback of Notre-Dame
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Jerry Maguire
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Mohamed El-Gabri

Ghost and The Darkness
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1:30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

The Cable Guy
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. New Odeon III, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A Time To Kill
Karim II, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Moonlight and Valentino
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Maximum Risk
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Spy Hard
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

MUSIC

Song and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 21 March, 8pm.
Nevine Allouba (soprano), Walid Korayem (tenor) and Amira Fouad (piano) perform.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, as above, 22 March, 8pm.
Music by Rageh Daoud, Dvorak and Shostakovich performed by violonist Salma Sadek.

The Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, as above. 22 March, 11am.

The Melodies Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 22 March. 9pm.

Clarinet and Piano Recital
Small Hall, as above. 23 March. 8pm.
Performed by Mohamed Hamdy (clarinet) and David Hales (piano).

Bodo Molitor
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 23 March, 8pm.
Guitar and songs.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 24 March, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Modern Arabic Poems in Song
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 24 March, 11am.
Nevine Allouba sings poems by Amal Donqol.

Song Recital
Small Hall, as above. 25 March, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company.

Chamber Soloists of the Frankfurt Opera
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 26 March, 8pm.
Basma Abdel-Rehim and Christine Resibah (violin), Ludwig Hampe (viola), Kamel Salaheddin (cello) and Thomas Parenthaler (horn) perform Mozart, Schubert, Copland and Creston.

The Joachim Quartet
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 26 March, 9pm.
Volker Worlitzh (violin), Horst Fietsh (violin), Monika Huls (viola) and Klaus Heitz (violoncello) perform Mendelssohn, Wolf and Shubert.

Philippe Genty Company
Main Hall, as above. 26-28 March, 8pm & 27 March, 1pm.
Le Voyageur Immobile.

DANCE

Romeo and Juliet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 20 & 21 March, 8pm. Cairo Opera Ballet Company, directed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel.

THEATRE

Borg El-Madabegh (The Tannery Tower)
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 20 & 23-25 March, 8pm; 21 & 22 March, 6pm.
By Noaman Ashour, directed by Mahmoud El-Lozy.

Bahlool Fi Istambul (Bahlool In Istambul)
Ramsis Hilton Theatre, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Fri & Sun 8.30pm.

Hekmat Hanem..Almaz?
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 10pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 2444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.

El-Gamzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8.30pm, Wed & Thur, 10pm.

LECTURES

Individual and Society in the Muslim Mediterranean World – Production and Trade
Blue Room, Social Science Bldg, Greek Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 354 2964. 22 March.
11am-1pm: Railway Stations: Space and Social Life in 19th Century Egypt (in Arabic) by Mona Attalla. Trade With Nubia (in English) by Elizabeth Sartain *2.30pm-5pm:* Class Patterns of Consumption in Early 19th Century Egypt (in English) by Rasha El-Gammal. Individual and Collectivity in the Agricultural Economy of Pre-Colonial Morocco (in Arabic) by Nicolas Michel. The Manufactury at El-Khurunfish: An Experiment in Industrialisation? (in English) by Pascale Ghazaleh.

From Beauty Street to Beauty Lost: The Early Loves of Naguib Mahfouz
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 20 March, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Raymond Stock.

Drawing The City
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan ans Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. 23 March, 5pm.
Lecture by Kelli Wilson.

Isis From Philae To Rome
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 25 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Alessandro Rocati

Etat Islamique Ou Etat Seculier: Lecture Critique du Sheikh Khalil Abdel-Karim
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 25 March, 5pm.
Lecture in Arabic by Ali Mubarak, Cairo University.

When The Glory Faded
Cinema Hall, Czech Embassy, 4 Dokki St, Giza. Tel 348 5892. 26 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Ladislav Bares.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Ahmed Sabri

AFTER some delay, the Autumn Salon is here — at the **Centre for Arts, Zamalek** — and in spring. Over 3,000 works in various media were put forward from which the selection jury chose one third to be exhibited. Prize winners include **Mohamed Shaker** (painting), **Rabab Nimr** (drawing), **Said Abdel-Halim** (engraving), **Mahmoud Shoukri** (sculpture) and **Mohamed El-Shaarawi** (ceramics).

Shemou Gallery exhibits paintings — portraits and still-lifes — and sketches by **Ahmed Sabri**. In terms of technical mastery and composition, this pioneering artist's paintings have stood the test of time.

Ceramic works by **Mohamed Mandour** and paintings by **Abdel-Rahman El-Nashar** are on show at **Extra Gallery**. Mandour's vessels — in various sizes — are as elegant as ever and the paintings by Nashar could be called musical bas relief engravings: multi-levelled, Chinese-box-like, with recurring motifs mirroring each other — a visual equivalent of 1001 Nights.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

هكذا من الأصل

Salah Hashem spoke to Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni as he was accompanying Mrs Mubarak to Paris where she received the Avicenna Award, handed by UNESCO's Director-General Frederico Mayor, about his links with the city and what it means to him



Mrs Suzanne Mubarak with Frederico Mayor, director-general of UNESCO and Farouk Hosni, Egyptian minister of culture

An Egyptian in Paris

Farouk Hosni describes his relationship with Paris as "an almost mystical bond". That bond in fact started long before he set foot in Paris, when he was an undergraduate at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria.

"True, when you think of the Renaissance you think of Italy, but for us, the Louvre", says Farouk Hosni, "represented, particularly during undergraduate years, the meeting-place of all civilisations."

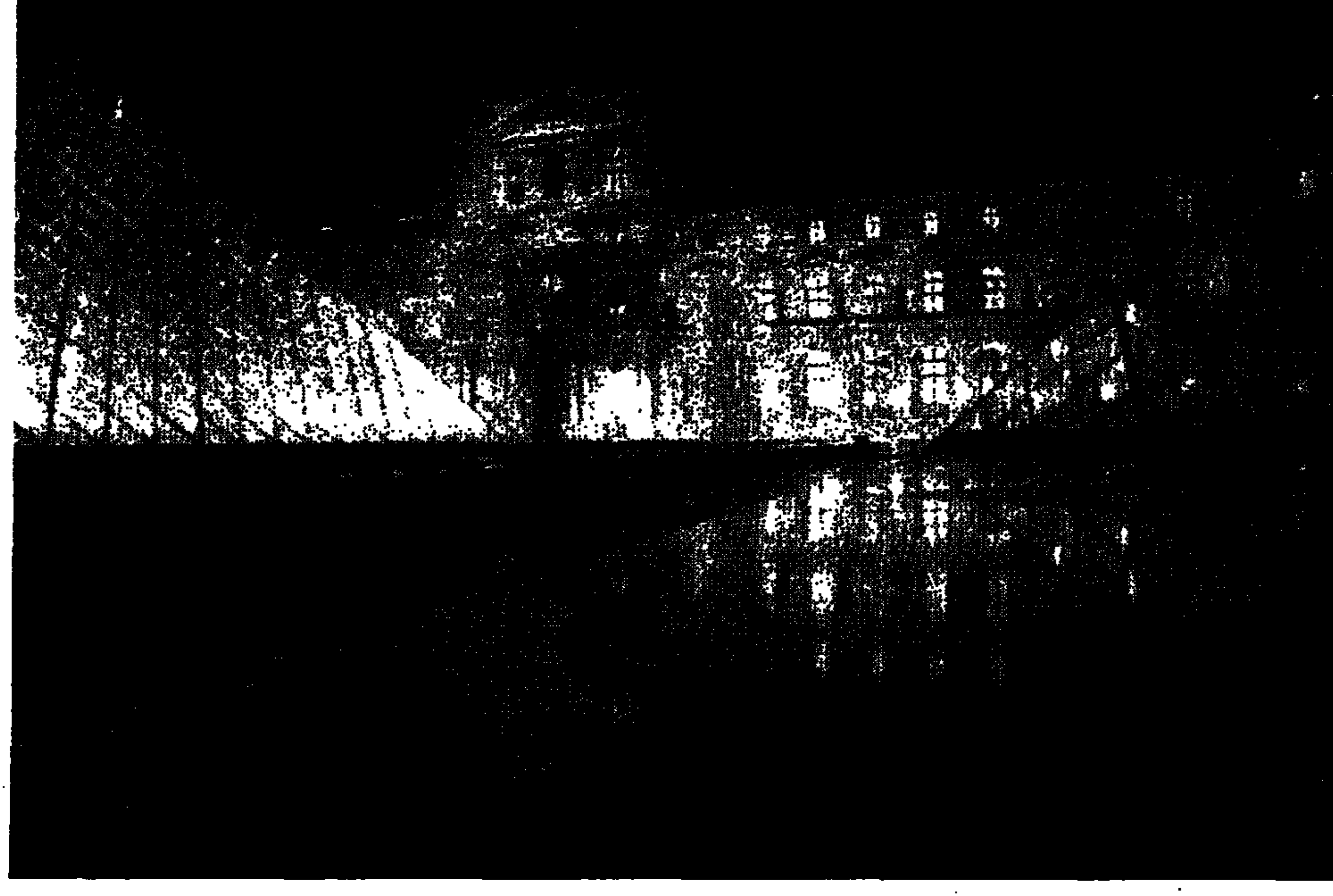
The Alexandria years were also a time of avid reading in French literature, and Hosni cites Victor Hugo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire as well as Verlaine and Rimbaud as formative influences. "Their depictions of Paris tantalised us, and set us dreaming of journeying to it, walking its streets and exploring its gorgeous quarters, breathing in freedom. We were totally immersed in French culture, to the extent that Paris came to represent a pilgrimage."

It was in the mid-'60s that Hosni finally landed in Paris, but then only for a fleeting visit. On his way to Brussels Hosni decided to stop in Paris and take the train from there.

"I arrived at night and it was raining. I walked and walked, drinking in everything I saw. I felt totally weightless, as if gravity had ceased to exist."

On his way back to Egypt, at the end of his six month scholarship in Belgium, Hosni decided to stop in Paris to visit the Louvre. "It was brief, but during this second visit I just knew that I would be revisiting Paris. Call it an intuition, but it was as if I had a rendezvous with the city."

As if to confirm his intuition, Hosni received yet another scholarship, this time to Paris. He spent the first nine months of his stay visiting different parts of France. One day, he passed by the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris where, he says "I felt very sad. The aroma of *ta'amiya* reached you as soon as you crossed the threshold. I sensed that some day I would return as director to the Egyptian Cultural Centre, that it would become a much more important place... And about 10 months later, I was suddenly offered the position of director of the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris."



"True, when you think of the Renaissance you think of Italy, but for us, the Louvre represented... the meeting-place of all civilisations"

How did this happen? Hosni says he never investigated the details of his appointment to the post, but instead asserts his faith in his own intuition. To demonstrate the veracity of his intuition he recounts another anecdote. He recalls that while in Paris, he had a dream where he was director of the Egyptian Academy in Rome. Such was the force and clarity of the dream that once, when saying good-bye to a friend who was leaving for Rome, Hosni caught himself saying, much to his own embarrassment: "Until we meet in Rome!" Three months later, he was approached about the post. To Hosni, the mark of genuine "intuition and intimations about one's future is their innocence; they are free of ego and personal ambitions."

As director of the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris for about nine years, Hosni was faced with formidable challenges. There was no infrastructure to the place that he could build on.

"The students wanted to monopolise control of the place. The whole thing could not have been further from national work. Even when we had discussions about participation and democracy, it transpired that all these words signified for them was that I should invite some of them to give public lectures. The concept I had for the centre *was to invite* bands, *hold exhibitions* and *public* cultural events worthy of representing Egypt and its culture."

During his tenure, the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris was a vibrant venue for theatre, folkloric Egyptian music, literary seminars as remembered by Egyptians who lived in the French capital at the time. "There is no doubt that Egyptian cinema only became known [in Paris] through the centre, and the same goes for other contemporary Egyptian art forms", says Hosni, who gives part of the credit to Dr Atef Sidqi.

"I cannot deny all his encouragement and support and the help he gave me. All these activities needed two people to handle them." The experience, he says, taught him a great deal about cultural work: "Paris gave me the stamina to face challenges. The experience [of running the Egyptian Cultural Centre] gave me the know-how, the understanding of how to evaluate and programme cultural works given specific policy aims."

He says that it was the Paris experience that taught him the difference between being a cultured person and the ability to form culture so that it might work as a catalyst. Hosni draws another parallel between his tenure as director of the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris and his current role at the helm of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture.

"As with my experience at the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Paris, no one could imagine what I had in mind for cultural work in Egypt... In Paris I had acquired a high degree of specialisation, and on my return to Egypt I set about putting into effect large-scale projects."

But for all the enticement of Paris, for all the metropolis gave him, Hosni would not say he is haunted by it.

"To me Paris is history but I prefer Rome. Rome is human: it is creativity, the dream. You can create in Rome, but here, in Paris, you can sell art. Here it's the market of culture, whereas Italy is the artistic laboratory, as it were. Paris, of course, has its own coquettish charm: she's like a woman who expects her beauty and adornment to be noted. But Italy is enchantment itself, an overwhelming enchantment."

Does Hosni then believe that Paris is still *the* cultural metropolis of the world?

"Paris is an important pole on the international cultural scene — a position it occupies with three other world capitals, London, New York and Cairo."

Explaining the precedence he gives Cairo over Rome, Hosni says that Cairo teems with life, "with things that had been hitherto submerged and have only recently come to the surface." It is not merely that Cairo participates in international festivals but that it garners prestigious awards there.

"Cairo has become a producer of culture and not solely in the Arab region but on the Mediterranean scene. The Arab Mediterranean culture, produced in the Cairene factory of the intellect, has reached all the way to Japan and the US". As concrete examples, he cites the awards Egyptian participants received at the Venice and Cairo Biennales.

Another area in which Cairo is making its mark is the recent proliferation of cultural venues adapted within historical buildings. "Today, our policy is to restore and develop historical buildings that lend themselves to cultural activities. Among them are the Zeinab Khatoun house, the Harrawi house, the Sinnari house and the Suheimi house, as well as the Mawlawiya Dervishes' theatre. The idea is not only that such buildings could provide much needed space for cultural activities, but also that these activities would be in keeping with the spirit and history of the venue."

In terms of the actual events that mark the annual cultural calendar, Hosni singles out for mention the Experimental Theatre Festival in which some 45 countries participate every year. Nor have literature and heritage been overlooked: seminars like that on Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi are held on a regular basis.

"In Egypt now, there are 62 youth theatre troupes, in addition to modern theatre, ballet, the Opera, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, the Arabic Music Ensemble and children's chorales, as well as the many music libraries and cultural centres that can compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world. All this has contributed to dressing Cairo in modern garb, "offers Hosni.

But to enumerate these achievements might obscure the manifold obstacles Hosni first had to face. "When I set out on this journey [of being Minister of Culture] 10 years ago, I was aware from the start that it would be a battle, a fight even — and there is no dearth of spiteful people — but my motto was that one derives strength from the job itself and from the people.",

Gradually, his achievements made their mark and could no longer be overlooked. "I have for long made a habit of not looking back, but 10 years on, I said, let's pause to evaluate cultural work in the last decade. And I was amazed *at how much had been done* in such a short time", he declares. Pausing for breath, Hosni appears to be pondering a misgiving.

"I am certain that whoever succeeds will be unable to undo the achievements of the last decade. When I came to head the ministry, the Academy of Arts comprised five buildings while now there are 17. During my time in office important institutions such as the Cultural Development Fund have come into being. I was the one who created the Experimental Theatre Festival, and who can now cancel it? If I were to attempt that, I'd be shot. Nor can the antiquities restoration work be undone by those who might follow."

So has Hosni had carte blanche to act freely and to formulate and follow up the projects he chooses?

"Frankly, before I took over the Ministry of Culture, the regime was already very keen on facilitating proper cultural channels...When I started, the general atmosphere was very discouraging. Everything was *haram*: Music was *haram*, dance was *haram*. Merely to discuss culture was considered atheism." Against this discouraging backdrop, however, Hosni proceeded undaunted.

"When I submitted to the president the cultural strategy I had outlined I received his and his wife's personal approval and support. Furthermore, Dr Atef Sidqi, then prime minister, knew me intimately and was aware of what could be achieved — he was prescient, and he backed me up. And now, the cabinet under Dr El-Ganzouri supplies all our demands."

Smilingly, Hosni quotes an incident that took place during Mrs Mubarak's visit to Paris. "I overheard Frederico Mayor, UNESCO's director-general, saying to Mrs Mubarak that '*the greatest post in the world at the moment is* that of Egyptian minister of culture.' I said to him it was a huge responsibility... He offered to work as a consultant to the ministry!"

Back on the subject of Paris, I asked whether he thought that there was any truth in the assertion that the best way to become acquainted with France was to visit a Parisian intellectual.

"Happily, we grew up with a dual culture: our own Oriental culture, and Western culture which we first became acquainted with on our own turf", he explained. "Thus, we are capable of appreciating both oriental and Western music. We speak their language, but then it is quite rare to find someone among them who speaks Arabic. Therefore we are better placed to receive and assimilate more."

And the essential stops on his itinerary every time he visits Paris?

"I go about it like an American tourist visiting Paris for the first time. Every time I'm here, I pass by the Quartier Latin, Saint Germain, Les Halles. I go for a walk in the Champs Elysées, and I make sure to have a plate of couscous at a Moroccan restaurant — like everyone else."

Books

The traditions of belief

Adabiyat Al-Mathour Al-Sha'bi Fi Moulid Al-Sayed Al-Badawi (Popular Literary Traditions Associated With the *Moulid* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi), Ibrahim Helmi. Cairo: Hayat Qussour Al-Thaqafa, 1997

An invaluable corpus of popular literature has accrued around the many *mawaled* that are celebrated in Egypt, a body of words that may well, in the very near future die out. Certainly, one of the most important tasks facing *interested* researchers is to record this body of work before it disappears and is lost forever, and Ibrahim Helmi has undertaken an important and necessary task in recording the oral narratives associated with Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, in whose honour the largest of Egyptian *mawaled* is held every year in Tanta.

Popularly referred to as Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, Al-Sayed Abu Farraj was born in Fas in Morocco in 596AH. In 633AH, Al-Badawi had a vision in which he was told to go to Iraq. *Once there, he* had another vision, this time pointing him towards Egypt, and specifically to Tanta. Once again he obeyed the vision and so it was that Al-Badawi arrived in the Delta town where he was to remain until his death in 675AH. And it was in Tanta where Al-Badawi was increasingly sought out by the poor, to whom he would give instruction free of charge on the roof of the house of Ibn Sheheit, one of *his disciples.*

The author lists 16 appellations and titles by which Al-Badawi is commonly referred to, including Al-Mulaththam, Abu Al-Fityan, Al-Qutb, Bahr Al-Ulum, Abu Farrag, Al-Attab, Al-Zahid and Gayaab Al-Athir. The latter title, Gayab Al-Athir (he who brings captives), is obviously related to the popular belief that Al-Badawi travels to the lands of the infidel to bring back Muslim *captives*, a tradition recorded by Ahmed Amin in his *Qamus Al-Adaat Wal-Taqalid Al-Misriya* (Dictionary of Egyptian Customs and Traditions). A custom bearing witness to this tradition is enacted annually at the *moulid* of Al-Badawi when ten or more men, clad in white gowns, stand manacled and chained, claiming to be the captives of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi.

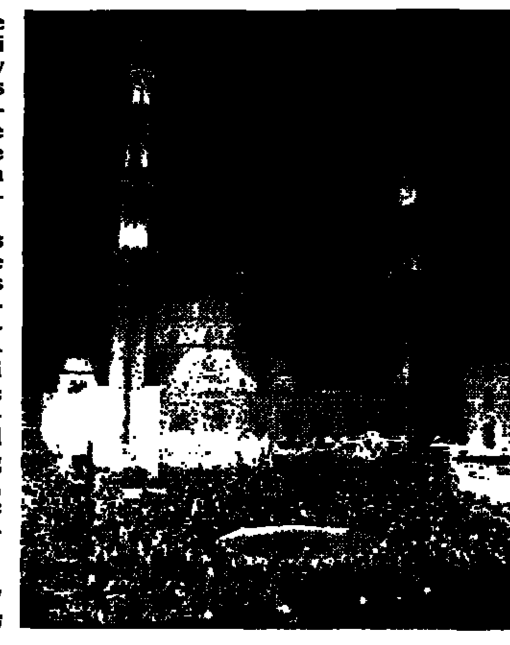
The author notes that the many titles and epithets conferred on Al-Sayed Al-Badawi reflect a *continuity of the Ancient Egyptian custom of giving* a variety of titles to the gods and also adds the intriguing coda that several of the titles date back to the height of Crusading activity in the region.

There is no doubt that the status of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi in the collective imagination approaches that of the prophets. Abdel-Samad Al-Ahmadi narrates the story of a woman who, when her son was captured by the Franks, sought the intercession of Al-Sayed who managed to return her son, still in his prisoner's chains. And among other powers credited to Al-Badawi is the miraculous ability to cure illness.

Delving into material previously researched by Dr Nabila Ibrahim and Abdel-Halim Ahmed, the author analyses the eloquent words of Al-Badawi to Fatma Ibn Barri, a great beauty whom many courted. Helmi also charts the regular appearances *of Al-Badawi in popular sagas.* In the oral narrative on Al-Zaher Baybars, we discover that the latter's relationship with Al-Badawi started before he came to power in Egypt and that it was through Al-Badawi's intercession that Baybars was rescued from certain death more than once.

But it is for his field-work and for the relentless unearthing of new material that Helmi is to be most lauded. And one of the most interesting items in the current volume is the transcription of a near*ly forgotten popular song by Hagga Haniyat Shaaban* on the life of Al-Badawi. The book also includes several fascinating interviews Helmi conducted with people who regularly attend the *moulid* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi. The choice of interviewees, whose ages ranged from 25 to 65, and their publication here, testifies to the continuing allure possessed by Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, yielding, in the process, a remarkably rich reading of the manner in which myths are perpetuated and constantly renewed.

Reviewed by ***Mahmoud El-Wardani***



The *moulid* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, the largest of Egyptian *mawaled*, is held every year in Tanta

Plain Talk

Recently I received a copy of *My Experiences in Art and Life* by Hassan Heshmat, one of our leading ce*ramists and sculptors. The* book is a frank account of the artist's life and his emergence as an international figure in the field of ceramics. The book brought back some pleasant memories of my own life and work in London, since in April 1956 I had the pleasurable task of *organising his first exhibi*tion in London.

I had read in the French papers some reviews of Heshmat's exhibition in Paris and the praise showered on his works urged me to phone our embassy in Paris and ask them to dispatch whatever was left over to London.

Hassan arrived with a number of pieces and the exhibition was held at the Egyptian Institute of which I was secretary and, again, it met with great success. I still remember how the leading art critics of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Express* welcomed the exhibition, along with a very positive commentary in the leading magazine *Art Review*. Hassan's exhibition was my last activity in London, since a few months later I was on my way to Egypt on board an Orient *Line ship*.

I would like to mention that Hassan Heshmat's exhibition was the fourth of a series of art shows by a number of Egyptian artists. Previously, the Egyptian Institute had hosted Gazbia Sirry, Tahia Halim and her husband, and, above all, the works of Habib Gorgy's school of spontaneous art. And while organising those exhibitions my belief that art is the best and easiest means of explaining one country to another was confirmed.

Heshmat's book is introduced by no less than Dr Sarwat Okasha. Here, Dr Okasha sums up the philosophy and technique of the artist when he writes:

"With the truthful and honest expression of his nationalism he, at the same time, reflects both internationalism and humanism. *The attachment of art to its* time does not preclude its embodiment of some eternal values across the ages. His attachment to his environment and society does not deny the fact that he is addressing all humanity."

Dr Okasha's words seem to be underlined by the fact that Hassan Heshmat's works have been acquired by a number of museums in several countries, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Germany and Switzerland.

One particularly interesting anecdote included in *the volume concerns a group* of Belgium priests who commissioned Heshmat to produce a statue for their church. The installation was accompanied by an exhibition of the artist's works. This was in 1970, the conclusion of a period in which the artist had worked almost exclusively on monumental pieces of sculpture.

It would be difficult to follow all the exhibitions of Heshmat, *either in* Egypt or abroad. One thing, however, which characterises him is his insistence on good design *for* everyday, *household objects. Indeed, there is* much about Heshmat that is reminiscent of William Morris, who endeavoured to create a new kind of object which combined the commercial and the artistic, the functional and the aesthetically appealing.

There is much truth in what one Egyptian critic wrote: "The art of Hassan Heshmat is available to all, from the university professor to the man in the street, yet all the time keeping the principles of fine art."

Hassan Heshmat can be regarded as a successful public relations specialist for Egypt. His works were not kept within the narrow limits of one country, but have represented the best of Egypt abroad. Even Africa has its share of his works and in the early eighties he was asked by Dr Boutros Ghali, who was the state minister of foreign affairs, to make three statues to be presented by Egypt to Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Congo.

Another Heshmat landmark occupies the central square of the Swedish city Malmeu, a colossal statue of two female Egyptian peas*ants. Its unveiling was one* of the central events of a major civic celebration.

Again I would like to quote Dr Okasha when he writes: "The nationalism of high art is, in fact, its only way to acquire international stature, by which I mean that such works of art express the unique characteristics of a people."

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram Weekly

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On the White Whale's trail

At a time when East and West are trying to imbue education systems with some relevance, a private French association is launching a sailing boat on its twelfth educational voyage around the world. Fayza Hassan speaks to one of the organisers in Cairo

Cross-cultural understanding often seems impossibly idealistic or, at best, a cliché. Conferences bring together university students for a few days; tolerance of different customs is encouraged. But efforts which remain largely theoretical, or create an artificial atmosphere of conviviality, rarely seem to have much of an impact. One experiment, however, has received little publicity, but seems to be working quietly in the right direction, and may accomplish more than an army of translators ever could.

Every year for the past decade or so, a group of 12 to 15 French school children, boys and girls aged between 11 and 16, leave France on a voyage of discovery. Selected according to criteria established by the private French association La Baleine Blanche (The White Whale), they accomplish an extraordinary sea voyage, going on a marvelous adventure instead of attending school like millions of other youngsters.

Every year, a different group sets out for a 10-month voyage, following the trail blazed by the famous navigators of the 18th century, crossing the Mediterranean and even the Atlantic, and plying the seas on sail boats with the aim of discovering other cultures and sharing the everyday lives of a multitude of different people. These children have lived in places many of their schoolmates only read about in geography books.

The aims of this educational experiment are multiple. Didier Cottet, an organiser of the voyages and one of the two adults accompanying the children on their present trip to Egypt, explains: "It is a more effective way, we think, to create awareness among the children. They learn about other countries and about their people by living in their communities and in their homes, sharing their daily routines."

The children not only live an adventure, they report on it, and observations collected about people, customs, the environment as well as their own personal impressions are consigned to journals kept by the youngsters themselves. Several voyages have yielded four books recounting the day-to-day events of the group's ten months at sea and on hand. Sometimes, when it is feasible, the children are coached or assisted by professionals in a particular field, from underwater photography to journalistic writing. This year, Ghislaine Alleaume, co-director of the CEDEJ (Centre d'Etudes Economiques et Juridiques) and an experienced diver, will join the group for some underwater exploring.

The children who are selected for each adventure are chosen through one or two 15-day "holidays" during which they share quarters and daily chores. "The ultimate reasons governing the selections are various, often based on intuition," says Cottet, "but most importantly they have to really want to go. They must be animated by a sincere curiosity towards other places. To know, to experience is to better understand the planet they are living on."

The whole point is for the children to learn, not to be taught. There are neither textbooks nor homework. Instead, they do the work of regular sailors, scrubbing, cleaning, repairing and repainting, as well as actually sailing the boats on the high seas. They cook, clean their quarters, do the washing, take care of themselves and each other and are generally left alone to interact within the group and make collective decisions. The adults accompanying them may provide a sort of support system in times of need, but basically prefer not to interfere.

During the 1993/1994 school year, from September to July, one group of children sailed around the Mediterranean on a 10-metre catamaran and a 20-metre wooden tri-sail, mooring their boats at various points on the African and Asian coasts. In Tunisia, they left their boats to work with the fishermen on their feluccas. In Egypt, they visited Port Said and sailed on Lake Manzala, and in Cairo they shared the life of the *zabbalin*, accompanying them at dawn on their garbage collection rounds.

They roamed freely in groups of two or three in the streets, making friends as they went along. They observed the rhythm of life during the month of Ramadan, had *iftar* at El-Hussein and, in the evenings, drank *sahlab* and *yansoun* in Mimi's café. They visited Geziret El-Dahab, and walked through the fields of *fuul* and *bersim*, ending up in a small café where Abdu, their host, went regularly to smoke the *goza*.

They got to know a family who lives in the City of the Dead, where they were invited to drink strong, sweet tea, then played hide and seek among the tombs with the family's daughter, Zouba, who introduced them to other children living in the area. After the game, as the sun set, Zouba invited them in for an *iftar* of *fuul* and *tehina*.

In France, they had heard of people living among the tombs. It had sounded ominous. Now they saw them in a different way. "It is night time when the meal is over, and we have to go," wrote one of the children. "To find a taxi, it is necessary to walk across the cemetery. I had already done it in day time, but at night it was different. The atmosphere is warm, one feels that this area is inhabited, with people asleep, not dead. In France, I would never have dared do that, cross a cemetery at night. I used to find them quite empty, cold and dead by day. I had hoped to find a new relationship between life and death here, different from that which I had known in France.

"I had always felt ill at ease in holy places. Why? I can't say, but here, for the first time I felt good among the tombs. It is a living cemetery: there are people who give it life. The tombs double up as desks for children doing homework or drawing, they are used as seats to rest a while, as poles to tie clothes lines around, as perfect hiding places for a hide and seek game... I met a family with seven children. They were all sitting on the tombs as if they were benches. It looked so normal to me that I joined them. This atmosphere has changed my outlook: the people here are like us, but they have a different outlook on death."

In 1994/1995, a new voyage took the children and four adults on an 8,000-mile tour of the coasts of Africa. This year they are back in Egypt. They had hoped to live in a small village of the Delta, accompanying the local puppeteer on his tour and working with the theatrical troupe in the village. The local authorities, however, refused to let them live with the villagers and insisted that the children move into a hotel in the nearest town. They would be transported by bus every day from the hotel to the theatre and back. Cottet refused this arrangement. Sharing the life of the people is one of the principles on which the experiment is built.

The children are presently in Marsa Alam, intending to move to the environs of Hurghada later, where they will dive and discover more about the sea and its inhabitants than they would ever have learned in biology.



Pass the potatoes, please

I have a theory about people's weight in general, and my own in particular. It is not a very original theory, but it has the merit of being slightly controversial, energetically opposed by dieticians who make their bread and butter out of depriving us of our own.

I think that each individual's "ideal" weight is determined at birth and, barring any pathological disorder, will develop according to a pre-ordained pattern. Altering this pattern belongs to the future and genetic engineers. Now many specialists beg to differ. They highly recommend diet and exercise as the means — the one and only — of acquiring the dreamlike figure we have been taught to fantasise about. Over the years, they have cunningly developed a whole array of sophisticated regimens and complicated gymnastics intended to attract, impress and convince a docile clientele, which, having been humbled enough by the misery inflicted on them, are more than ready to take upon themselves the entire blame for any hiccup in the system. With their sallow complexion spelling malnutrition and their bitter expression recounting their misery, they confess their sins: they did have two more lettuce leaves, and maybe a radish or two, on one occasion; this is why the diet did not work, of course. In self-flagellation, they are ready to spend the next days drinking herbal teas or whatever other dreadful concoction their guru of the moment has dreamed up for them. One dietician once confessed that he enjoyed concocting unpleasant diets, insisting on Brussels sprouts, for instance, when he could easily have chosen a less objectionable vegetable. "The more they suffer, the more they believe in me," was his telling comment.

I became aware of my shape when I was around ten. After several stations in front of my mirror I came to the regrettable conclusion that I looked like a pear. Much later I learned that I suffered from the pyramid syndrome, a condition affecting a large number of Egyptian women. Had I been presented at the time with the traditional belly dancer's body for a model, I might have been able to achieve some sort of coherence between reality and aspirations. An avid reader of fashion magazines, however, I latched onto role models of more fragile variety. Consequently I dreamed of long legs, tight hips, a bee's waist and drooping shoulders. A mortal pallor was a distinct advantage. I grew so attached to my aspirations that I confused my dreams with reality. One day, strolling down Qasr El-Nil Street — at the time when one could still walk on the footpaths without being trampled — I glimpsed a figure reflected in a shop window and turned around to look at the chubby teenager behind me. There was no one there.

In those distant days, I was still a believer in the necessity of striving towards perfection. Therefore, I dutifully deprived myself, sometimes exercised and even, on occasions, did both at the same time. I lost weight many times. Eventually I would get bored with the whole process and have one good meal. That was usually enough to get me back to where I had started. I felt that my whole life was reduced to a calorie count. Deprivation brought negligible results, on which, moreover, my nearest and dearest could not agree. Some thought I looked better after the diet; others, before.

During one of my low periods, as I was contemplating the possibility of becoming a leaf-chewing hermit, my husband invited a young couple over for dinner one evening. "You should see Belinda," he told me. "She is really something else." She was that and more. She even had deep violet eyes which would have given Bambi strong suicidal inclinations. I had never met anyone with violet eyes. She had probably been born in the jeans and tank top she was wearing. How else could they have fitted so well? This creature had stepped right out of the pages of *Vogue*. She was perfect, unreal. Suddenly, I realised how futile my efforts at improving my own looks had been. How could I ever compete with so much glamour? I retreated to the kitchen and busied myself with the *kubeba*. Soon Belinda's boyfriend joined me. He seemed inordinately taken by my cuisine. Embarrassed to let him contemplate my physical shortcomings — and observe my culinary shortcuts — I sent him back to his sweetheart. He stood there sulking. "She can't cook," he said suddenly. "So?" I asked, rather surprised. "She is beautiful, she doesn't need to *cook*." I was shocked at the idea of Belinda doing something as vulgar as preparing a meal. I could only imagine her nibbling on rose petals. "She is stupid," the boyfriend informed me confidentially. "She spends her time in front of the mirror. She is completely useless." I was furious. There he was, escort to the most beautiful girl in the world, and he dared complain that she had no brains. What if she didn't? Had I looked like her, I would not have minded being a bumbling idiot.

In the end, however, I had to admit that the poor boy was right. Belinda was stupid above and beyond the call of beauty. I watched her dissect a lettuce leaf with her perfect teeth, spitting the bits into her plate, while detailing the diet she had been on for the past six months. She chewed the food, then spat most of it out, she told us. That way, she enjoyed the taste without putting any weight on. She then regaled us with a short demonstration of push-ups she had invented for maximum effectiveness. I imagined myself having to put up with such behavioural disorders for longer than that evening. My husband had stopped looking at Belinda with his mouth open. He was now diligently filling it with *kubeba*. The boyfriend was observing us ironically. Physical perfection had been the unreachable aim of my life. I resented Belinda. She had shattered my dreams.

Later, I learned that she and her partner had split up, and that she had popped off to Hollywood. Somehow she must have gotten lost there, because I never saw her on a screen, big or small. After her visit, I stopped counting calories. For the first time, I was eating as I pleased. It made little difference to my weight but a great deal to my disposition, which became distinctly happier. Periodically, my friends and relations advise me to go on this or that miraculous diet. They themselves endlessly eat only bananas, sport little needles in their ears, drink hot mineral water, take up yoga, split their tasteless meals into compatible and incompatible bits and pieces and generally work hard at creating their own hell. Dissatisfied, they search for a harder diet, a sterner guru, to torture themselves that little bit more. I listen to them patiently, then ask about the pastry shop that opened recently. "Do you know what cholesterol is going to do to you?" they demand. I don't. But I know what frustration is doing to them.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken *kofta*

Ingredients:

One chicken (boiled cooked)
One onion (grated)
One cup whole milk
One bunch parsley (finely chopped)
One tbsp. white flour
Two eggs (beaten)
Bread crumbs
Butter
Ghee + oil (for frying)
Salt + pepper + allspice + nutmeg (grated)

Method:

Remove the bones and skin from the chicken, then chop the flesh in a meat chopper. Add the onion, the parsley and season. In a cooking pan, melt the butter and gently fry the flour until it colours, then add the milk and stir vigorously over low heat until it thickens. Season and allow to cool off. Add it to the chicken mix and stir in until all ingredients blend well. Rub your hands in some white flour, then form the blend into fingers. Soak them in the beaten eggs, then roll them in the bread crumbs and deep fry the *kofta* in a very hot mixture of ghee and oil. Place on kitchen blotting paper when goldened. Serve hot with spaghetti and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

A place to retire

Nigel Ryan stretches his legs

The Ibis Café at the Nile Hilton is spacious and uncluttered. It manages to absorb the central pergola around the buffet table without much ado. You really do not notice it, which is all to the good since what are, in the end, garden features have always, despite their popularity, seemed a little incongruous indoors.

Tables are large and well-spaced, and even when they are all full there is very little sense of overcrowding. The sense of space is further emphasised by the fact that one of the Café's four walls consists entirely of glass, and the restaurant is thus, during daylight hours, remarkably light; something of a boon these days when so many eating places seem to aspire to a sort of Stygian gloom.

The menu is no more than you would expect from the café restaurant of a five star hotel. It is perfectly possible to order a hefty meal, and just as easy to choose a light snack. Nor, in the latter case, is there any possibility of not hitting the minimum charge, which at LE10.50 remains rather modest by today's standards.

At lunchtime it is seldom as crowded as during the evenings and so, if anything, seems even more spacious. And it really is a pleasure to be able to stretch one's legs and not feel totally hunched around a table. It works wonders for your sense of well being.

There is some overlap on the menu between the Ibis Café and its outdoor neighbour, which is hardly surprising since it would be unlikely if they actually used separate kitchens. The duplication, though, is only in the snackier end of the menu.

Lunching alone, and not particularly hungry, I chose chilli con carne, which the menu listed as being served with grated cheddar cheese, which struck me as a trifle odd, guacamole and tacos. First, though, the waiter brought a basket of bread, and a few of those portion control packets of butter. Now I've always had a soft spot for the bread produced by the Nile Hilton bakery. It is neither earnestly wholemeal and healthy, nor overdressed. But for good, plain white bread it is excellent.

The chilli con carne arrived atop a mound of short-grained rice, an unsurprising but perfectly passable mixture of kidney beans, green peppers, minced beef, very finely chopped carrots and tomatoes. The guacamole and grated cheddar arrived in small earthenware dishes, the cheddar a little tasteless and the guacamole tasting for all the world like mayonnaise, only in this instance a pale green. The tacos were nowhere to be seen.

Service throughout was excellent. And if you are in the mood, there is not a little pleasure to be had from overhearing the conversations that are being conducted at neighbouring tables, usually between middle-aged American tourists who have been thrown arbitrarily together on some package deal. Why, one wonders, as they sit deadpan at their tables, have they come all this way, and spent all this money to talk with perfect strangers about their plans to retire to Seattle?

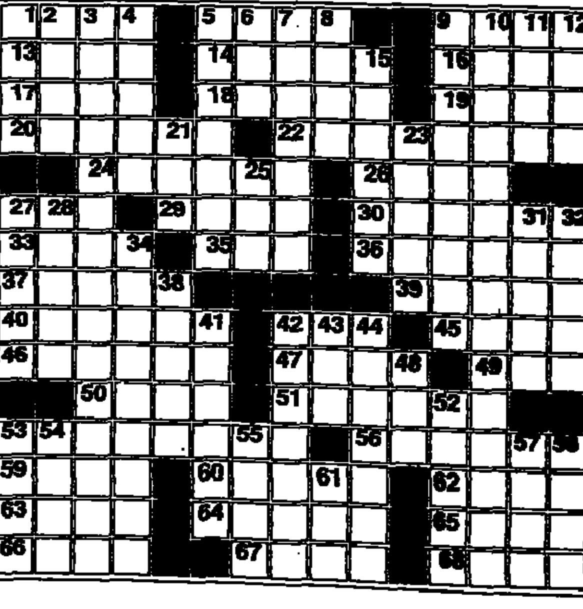
Lunch for one, with a small bottle of mineral water, brought a bill of LE36.

Ibis Café, Nile Hilton (ground floor), Tahrir Square

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

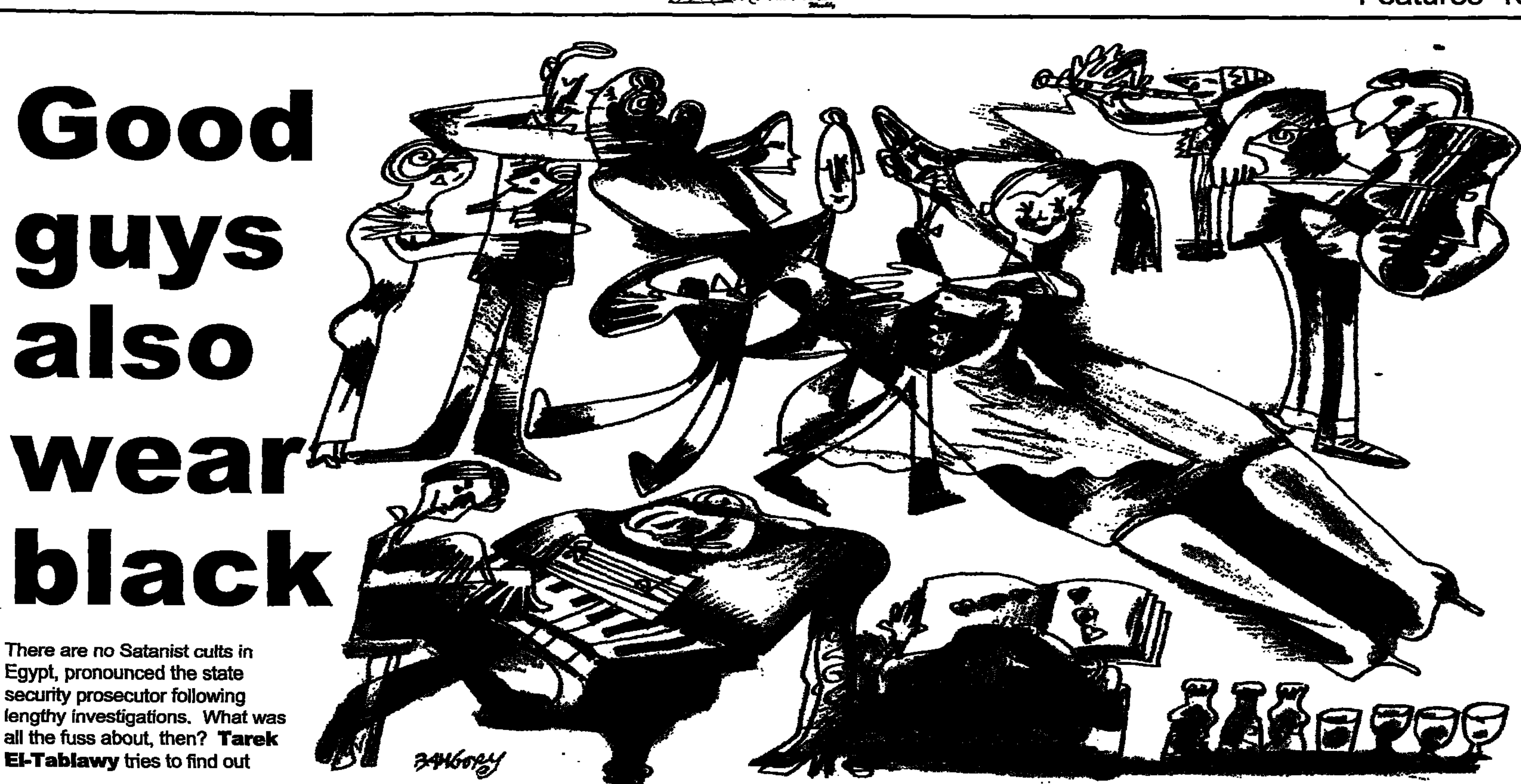


ACROSS
1. Pannikins (4)
5. Commanded (4)
9. Man (4)
13. Indian nurse (4)
14. Dodge; sidetrack (5)
16. Wife, L. (4)
17. Velocity; evaluate (4)
18. Black fluid of cuttlefish (5)
19. Cons, jumbled (4)
20. Small pincers (6)
22. Forced back (8)
26. Malay boat (4)
27. Went precipitately (4)
29. Jeers (4)
30. Opaque coating of metallic surface (6)
33. Culture medium (4)
35. Weather directions (3)
36. Spectators watching tennis (6)
37. Obliterates (5)
39. Provide adequately with, 2 wds (5)
40. River-dam for irrigation (6)
42. Stomach of animal (3)
45. Laugh, Fr. (4)
46. Proceed (6)
47. Progenitor of human race (4)
49. Office of Economic Opportunity, abb. (3)
50. ..blanch = cavalry sword (4)
51. Member of one of the four major tribes of ancient Greece (6)
53. Extend further (8)
56. Desert rodent (6)
59. In ballet, bending of knees (4)
60. Cleave; a shaving (3)
62. Pledge (4)
63. Presently (4)
64. Corrals (5)
65. A crystalline compound (4)
66. Stale urine, used in wool scouring (4)
67. Throw missile (4)
68. Makes best use of (4)

DOWN
1. Talk querulously; fish (4)
2. Egyptian poet Dongol (4)
3. Jingoism; conversion to people's property (15)
4. Folio (5)
5. Musical instrument (7)
6. Hail! (3)
7. Demoralise (7)
8. It is the name of a canal, port, tribe and lake in the US (4)
9. Attendant changing sportsman's firing arms (9)
10. In printing, sign denoting sudden emotion (15)
11. Pry (4)
12. Trampled (4)
15. Knocked (6)
21. Eve's origin (3)
23. Sea-eagles (5)
25. Disseminate (3)
27. Radio-location (5)
28. Chemical used to whiten flour (5)
31. Come into operation (5)
32. Poles, jumbled (5)
34. Occurring often (9)
38. Summary of what is known of a subject (5)
41. Very small (6)
42. District of Portugal, also name of cake and wine (7)
43. Bustle (3)
44. Most ardent (7)
48. Miss Farow (5)
52. Row; contest; advocate (5)
53. Precious stone (4)
54. Arm-bone (4)
55. Cheerful (4)
57. Double curve in architecture (4)
58. Pekoe et al (4)
61. Commander, abb. (3)

Last week's solution

Good guys also wear black



There are no Satanist cults in Egypt, pronounced the state security prosecutor following lengthy investigations. What was all the fuss about, then? **Tarek El-Tablawy** tries to find out

The search for an explanation is often confusing, and painful, in a sort of secondary, aftermath way — morally and intellectually perplexing. There must be a reason. Find the reason, and the event suddenly becomes easier to understand, justify and, subsequently, maybe, write off.

Roughly two months ago, 90 Egyptian youths found themselves unwitting participants in just such a moral and intellectual exercise — a Satanic worshipping drama whose curtain seemed to begin to descend only when Hisham Saraya, the state security prosecutor, declared, after lengthy investigations more thorough than those conducted by a sensationalist press corps, there are no Satanic cults in Egypt.

The behaviour and lifestyles of these youth, he said, is nothing more than a reflection of the fact that they are "reckless, thoughtless youths who, like parrots, chant European songs that are indifferent to religion." They may, in listening to heavy metal and dressing in black T-shirts, flout the principles of the good-old days virtue, but in the eyes of the law that does not constitute Satanism. End of story. Or is it?

For every issue such as this there are two main sides. The first deals with the facts — what actually happened. And the second, with that tapestry of sensationalised hype and myth — what people believe happened. While Saraya may have offered the answer to the legal question, thereby addressing the first side, the second, to a great extent, has yet to reach such a tidy conclusion.

In fact, few among the culture of youths who profess to being either overt or closet-Westernised Egyptians are convinced that the explanations proffered will go far in settling the issue. "What we have failed to grasp throughout this entire case is that it doesn't deal with heavy metal music or devil worshipping," stressed a 28-year-old businessman and heavy metal fan who wished to remain anonymous. "This case basically underscores the fact that there are two kinds of Egypt — the traditional and the Westernised — and the former just can't seem to come to terms even with the existence of the latter. Criticising another's taste in music, clothes or mannerism, therefore, does little more than undermine any efforts to develop a cohesive national identity that brings together the best of all elements of society."

Perhaps, though listening to heavy metal, getting drunk or taking drugs, rarely qualifies as the best that may be gleaned from one culture or another. "True, if this happened with these kids, then they were wrong. Nevertheless, in principle, there's a huge difference between listening to heavy metal, going to parties or dressing in a certain way and being morally compromised, let alone a devil worshiper," he added. "But try to explain this to certain conservative elements within this society and you may as well be talking to a brick wall."

In either directly or indirectly promoting the issue to a point where moods hardened to intransigence, media hype has played a major role. With no other basis of comparison, many bought into the rhetoric. Egypt's is a traditional society, where certain Western values should not be allowed to roost, they were repeatedly told.

"It starts off with these kids listening to evil music, then they get into drugs, start having sex with each other and, before you know it, the teachings of Islam are forgotten," remarked Abbas, a 46-year-old resident of Bulaq and father of three. "I would never allow my children to become involved in such scandalous activity."

For the time being, the Bulaq resident has little to fear. Abbas' children, along with those from similar backgrounds, don't seem particularly likely to run out to the tape shop and purchase a copy of Alice Cooper's *Trash* or the latest CD to be put out by *Soundgarden*. "Who's Alice Cooper?" asked 22-year-old Mamdouh, Abbas' eldest son. "Anyway, I don't care about Western music, or the problems of a group of kids who have too much money. I'm more concerned about finding a job that will give me enough money for marriage."

At best, heavy metal has a limited following, nowhere approximating the popularity of rock, pop or dance music, both in the West and, especially, in Egypt, where its fan-base is primarily upper-middle class youths. Polling a cross-section of nearly three hundred high school and university students from various socioeconomic groups, only 21 told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that they listen to heavy metal. And, of that figure, nine admitted to being die-hard fans. The rest enjoyed only the acoustic ballads and love songs put out by these groups.

"I like listening to slow songs with a nice beat," said Maha, a 20-year-old Ain Shams University student. "I can identify with the themes of these songs — love lost and gained. Isn't that why anyone listens to a certain kind of music, because they can relate to it?"

And, according to Hala Hashish, long-time host of Radio Cairo's "At your request" show, "heavy metal is a very small part of the music that is requested by Egyptian youths. There's not enough of a following for this kind of music in Egypt to warrant that it be played extensively."

So, why the uproar that has led many parents to throw away their children's promotional T-shirts, rock posters and CDs? Much of the controversy surrounding this kind of music, which is distinctive from other forms of rock in its heavy reliance on fast, bass power chords and distorted guitar riffs, stems from the lyrics as well as the music, itself.

More than just a generational gap between youths and their parents, the issue, which many have been quick to deem closed now that the first part of the verdict is in, has brought to the surface what could promise to be a sensitive debate over whether or not materialist, secular humanism, with its seductive technological wealth, toys and vices, promotes a godless hubris. In this light, heavy metal music, and the ensuing scandal surrounding a handful of its fans, is actually a symptom of a greater problem confronting a society unsure of just how much Westernisation is enough.

"In Egypt, there is a fundamental conflict between our traditional values and those that come from abroad. We are still moved by the idea that there is only one standard, one norm or one pattern of behaviour and belief," explains *Al-Ahram* columnist and long-time social and political pundit, Salama Ahmed Salama. "So long as this exists, any attempt at diversification at intellectual levels will be met with ardent resistance."

And resistance, at least from Egyptian customs and censorship authorities, as well as mainstream Egypt, is not something that Mustafa Abdel-Wadood, the manager of an upscale CD outlet, cares to confront. "We don't even try to import albums whose songs deal with sex or God," he said. "They would be turned away once the censorship board looks over the song titles." But has the Satanism scandal resulted in a diminishing demand for this kind of music or increased restrictions on its import? "No," stated Abdel-Wadood. It's still business as usual.

In the long run, in terms of sales or the popularity of certain kinds of music, this guarded import policy may not make much difference. But, according to Salama, the fundamental reasoning behind it is very telling of the way Egyptians view certain kinds of outside influence.

"When it comes to cultural integration, there is resistance in Egypt simply because there is no mechanism that allows the society to incorporate these elements in a constructive manner," continued Salama. "We automatically label things as either *halal* or *haram*, and make no effort to devise a way of discussing things in order for them to be morphosed, as, for example, the Japanese have done — in a manner deemed non-threatening to, or consistent with, the norms or traditions of the country."

Moreover, said the columnist, "Our youth, and this is a crisis, are raised on two kinds of values which, until now, have not been reconciled. On the one hand, the ideal is what they see in the West, but when they act as Westerners do, they are condemned or called apostates."

The majority of teens and young adults, like 16-year-old Basil El-Halwagy, however, have little desire to dissect the social fabric of the society in which they live. El-Halwagy, a junior at the Cairo American College (CAC) in Maadi, spent the first 10 years of his life living in the US, before moving back to Egypt. Like the majority of his CAC peers, Basil, when not trying to dodge the responsibility of doing homework, enjoys listening to music, spending time with his friends or beating up on his younger brother. But, according to some of the criteria laid out when the Satanic worshipping case first broke, he could have easily been lumped into the same category, simply because he may go to an occasional, rowdy party, enjoys listening to heavy metal and his clothes do not conform to the dress code deemed acceptable by many Egyptians.

"By listening to heavy metal," he explained, "I'm not out to be a rebel. I just like the pace of the music. But liking this music doesn't mean that I'm not an Egyptian; it simply means that I'm being me. And although I may not be able to understand or relate to all the experience of those living in working class neighbourhoods, I wouldn't presume to pass the same kind of judgment on them as they have on us. They're them and we're us — but we're all part of the same country."

But why not listen to other pop groups or artists like Celine Dion or Boyzone and not give anyone a chance to criticise? "They suck," El-Halwagy stated decisively. "Don't get me wrong, I don't mean that they are bad musicians or artists, just that I don't like their music too much. It's just not me."

War of the docks

A clash between investors and the governor of Aswan over dock construction has been settled by prime ministerial intervention. But as **Sherine Nasr** finds out, the controversy continues





The condition of the 38 docks which serve more than 260 Nile cruisers in Aswan is, according to one investor, "miserable"

Is the construction, by private investors, of new docks outside Aswan a boost for tourism, or a disaster for the environment? According to those involved, this question is at the root of the row that has raged between the investors and the Aswan governor for the past year or so. With both parties firmly entrenched in opposing positions, the deadlock on the continuation of dock construction has finally been broken by the intervention of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

The dispute began in 1996, when Aswan Governor Salah Mousbah ruled that construction work on the new docks near Aswan be halted, in accordance with a ruling forbidding construction within a three-kilometre radius of the new Aswan Bridge.

The need for more docks in the Aswan area has long been acknowledged by those in the tourist industry. "The shortage of fully-equipped docks for Nile cruisers is a big and ever-worsening problem. It is the main obstacle to the development of Nile cruise tourism," commented Adel Radi, head of the Tourist Development Authority (TDA).

There are currently some 38 docks serving more than 260 Nile cruisers in Aswan. Amir Fahim, one of the principal investors, described their condition as "miserable".

"They lack modern facilities and proper sanitary measures such as water and waste disposal," he said.

Aswan is a final destination for cruisers, rather than a stop-over port. Ships may dock there for more than 36 hours during the peak season, and even for 48 hours at other times of the year. "The inconvenience to the tourists cannot be overestimated. The ships are docked five or six deep and tourists have to jump, at the risk of personal safety, from one ship to another to reach land. It's worse for older people," said Ali Khalil, another investor. "Tourists often get lost trying to find their ship, and the sound of the vessels' generators is unbearable," he added. And, in case of a disaster such as a fire, "more than one ship could be affected."

Because suitable areas on the corniche within the city of Aswan itself are already largely built up, the investors had to look further afield for a site for the new docks. "Because of the narrowness of the river banks within the town, we were obliged to investigate other potential sites," Radi explained.

According to Radi, three international companies were approached. Their representatives examined the feasibility of various sites outside the town. The site eventually chosen was Baharif, an area eight kilometres north of Aswan.

Trouble struck when the location originally chosen for the new Aswan bridge was moved closer to the new docks. The governor's ruling that there should be no construction within a three-kilometre radius of the bridge now had dire consequences for the investors, because the docks fell within the prohibited area. The investors were naturally dismayed. "The idea of a no-building zone for three kilometres from the Aswan Bridge is simply ridiculous," commented Khalil.

Under the governor's orders, the docks were dismantled and building materials removed. Meanwhile, the angry investors filed their complaint with the prime minister, who eventually overrode the governor's decision and declared that construction could be resumed.

However, the governor was unwilling to give up easily. The investors' authorisation gave permission for work during the winter closure, the period when the minimum amount of extra water is released into the Nile through the Aswan High Dam, and when the Nile water level is therefore at its lowest. The investors had initially envisaged getting their work done during this period, because costs are lowest when the water level is lowest. The governor insisted on sticking to the letter of the authorisation: as the winter closure period was nearly over, the investors would have to wait till the next winter closure to recommence work.

"We were ready to start again immediately, even though our costs would be doubled," said Fahim. But the governor refused to budge, arguing that: "The water has risen again and building work will pollute the Nile."

So the workers and machinery remained idle and investors watched their losses rise still further. "I myself have lost half a million pounds. Other investors are no better off," said Fahim.

Pointing out that the hiatus in construction had already cost them millions of pounds, the investors once again appealed to the prime minister. A few weeks ago, he finally gave the go-ahead for work to continue immediately.

But what is behind the governor's attitude, which seems to run contrary to those in the tourist industry, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, which provided the investors with incentives?

The governor sees his role as that of a protector of the environment. "These constructions are a violation of the Nile, which I will never allow. It is a case of digging and dumping into the Nile," he said. "The investors claim that what they are building is simply a platform, but this is not the case. A functional dock has to have facilities, like generators and water supply among other things."

Mousbah added that it was not he, but the Nile Protection Department at the Ministry of Irrigation, which had ordered the dismantling of the construction. "The investors make it sound like a blow against investment, but this is not true," he stressed.

"We hold two different viewpoints," responded Khalil. "We think of it as a great project; the governor believes we are defiling the Nile."

According to investor Khalil, the docks were planned according to strict criteria set by the TDA. "Actual construction covers only 10 per cent of the area; structures have to be mobile and create a pleasant landscape. We have planned a fully-equipped dock with telecommunication facilities and a sound drainage system." The cost of the dock could amount to LE3 million, he added.

But the governor insists that it is his duty to "keep the area clear until plans for it are finalised by the cabinet." He argues that Baharif is an undeveloped area with no infrastructure. "There are no roads, electricity or regular transportation. Even if the docks were completed, they could not be used," he claimed.

Mousbah further maintained that the investors did not acquire a licence from the governorate to carry out their projects, a claim firmly denied by Fahim, who insisted: "We acquired the approval of all the ministries concerned. The land was sold to us."

The investors are convinced that they have right on their side. They argue that, as well as making Aswan a more attractive, less inconvenient, destination, the new docks will provide job opportunities. Governorate officials, on the other hand, seemed equally certain that the investors are out to make a quick profit at the expense of the environment. Although work on the docks is once again under way, the basic differences between the two camps seem no nearer to being resolved.

Action at Nabq

A NEW company has been formed to administer the development of Nabq tourist centre on the Aqaba Gulf at Sharm El-Sheikh. Apart from electricity and sewage projects with related tourist services, the area will be cleared of military debris.

The first part of the project covers the building of 27 four-star and five-star hotels, consisting of 6,500 rooms. The second part entails developing tourist and trade services, entertainment facilities, services for businessmen and banks as well as tour operators, diving centres, theatres, cinemas and museums in the area. A third, long-term project covers the development of land to the rear where a golf course, fun fair and zoo will be built along with workers' accommodations.

New air link

MAMDOUH El-Beltagui, the minister of tourism, recently met the minister of civil aviation of Azarbaijan, one of the republics of the defunct Soviet Union, to discuss cooperation between the two countries in the field of tourism and investments. "We intend to invite a delegation of senior tour operators, journalists and businessmen from Azarbaijan to visit Egypt and get acquainted with the Egyptian tourist product," explained El-Beltagui. In return, Azarbaijan will invite Egyptian businessmen, travel agents and hotel owners to their country.

The Azarbaijani minister said: "In February 1997, I signed an agreement with the head of the Egyptian Civil Aviation Authority to create an air link between our two countries. The inaugural flight is expected to take place in May 1997."

French sentiments

THE FRENCH magazine *Express* published a 60-page study of Egypt in its January edition. The first part covered the love of the French for Egypt and in particular the sentiments of their late-President François Mitterrand. It then dealt with French archaeological missions in Egypt and the French role in deciphering hieroglyphics, followed by a well-illustrated discussion of the Pharaonic monuments. The magazine also published an article written by the French archaeologist Lauer, who was responsible for the restoration of the Zoser Complex at Saqqara.

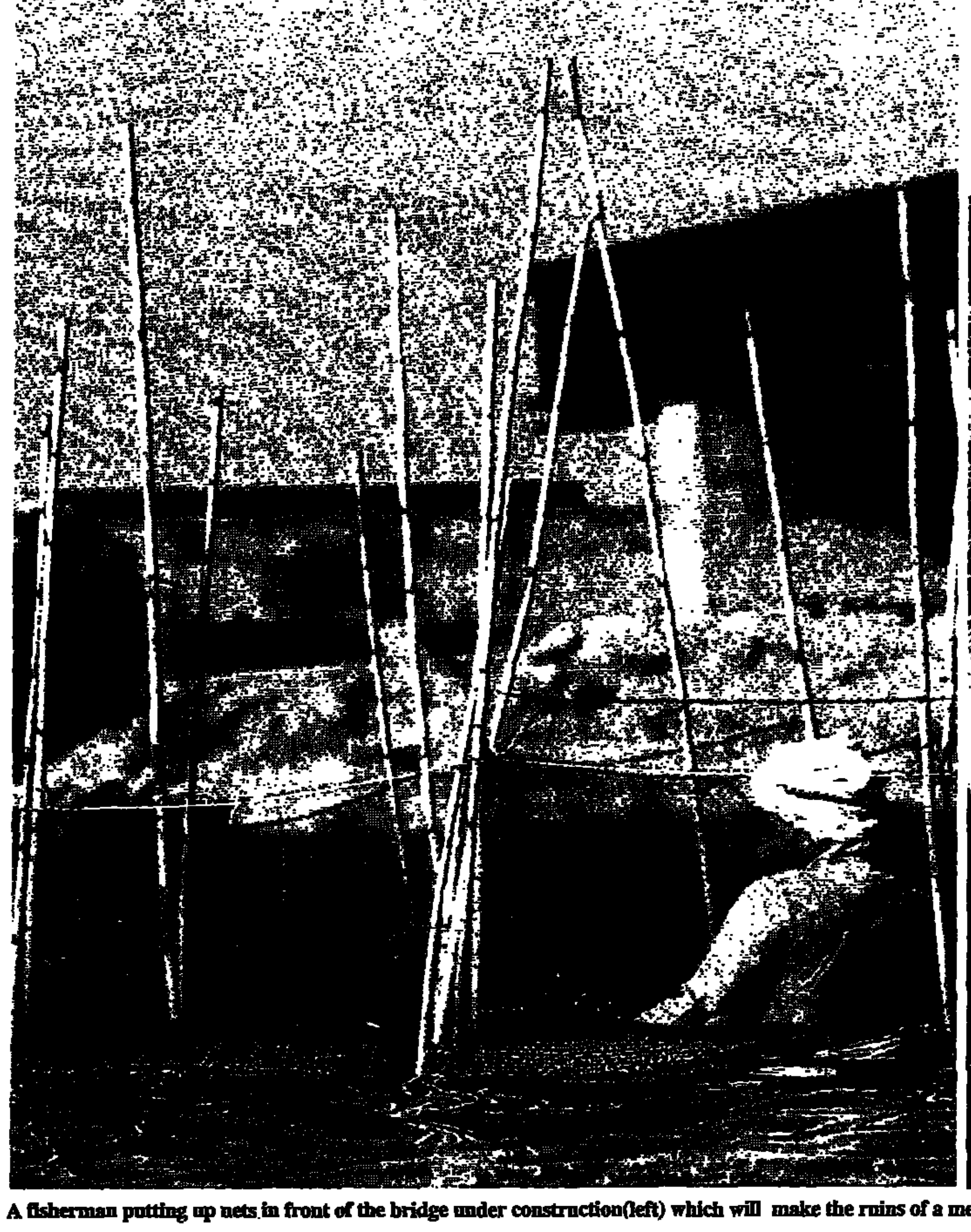
The magazine concluded with a four-page directory on Egyptian arts (radio, television, press, music and cinema) together with the most important books published about Egypt and its celebrities.

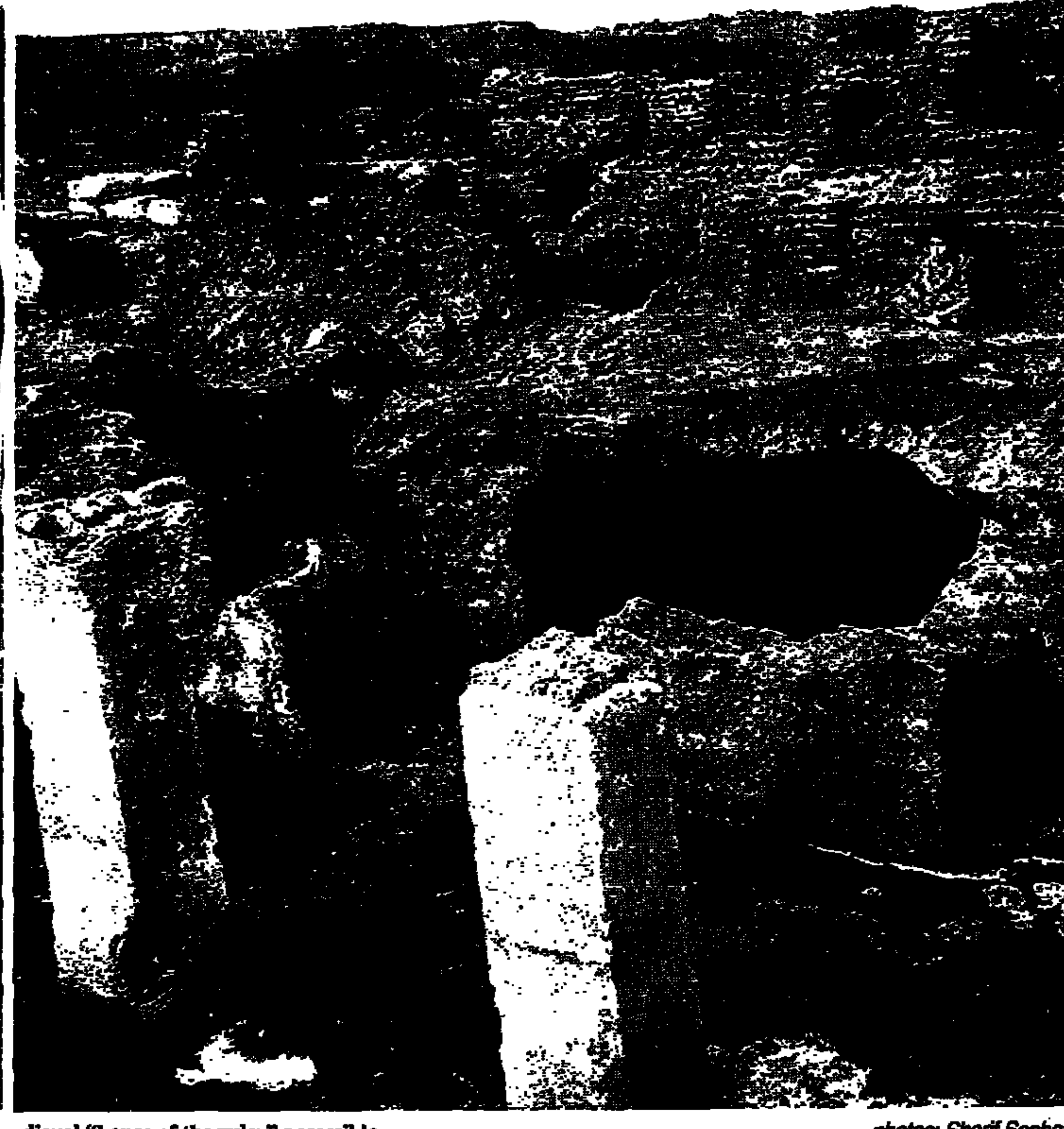
Airport costs

FOREIGN charter flights have threatened that they will stop landing at Taba International Airport due to its excessive servicing fees — much more than those paid in neighbouring airports.

Before the opening of the Taba airport, most charter flights used Ovda airport in Israel. Having felt the pinch of the high costs of landing in Taba, they are thinking of returning to Ovda. Whereas handling costs at Ovda airport are $1,171, those at Taba are $1,829. Fuel costs $0.94 per gallon in Ovda and $1.21 per gallon in Taba. Landing and navigation fees are free in Ovda while they can reach up to $263 in Taba.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**





A fisherman putting up nets in front of the bridge under construction(left) which will make the ruins of a medieval "house of the ruler" accessible

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Lost city on an island

It lies on the ancient northeastern frontier and it was once a huge city. Now it is being saved from oblivion, **Mahmoud Bakr** reports

Ti-Nis Island (not to be confused with Tanis in the northern Delta), accessible at present only by boat, is being 'dug-out' of the brackish water of Lake Manzala. It was once the location of a great medieval city famous for the production of fine textiles, where the caliph's cloaks were traditionally woven from gold threads, and where the magnificent cloth for the Kaaba, the holy shrine in Mecca, was made.

The site once boasted 160 mosques, 36 public baths, 100 sugar and oil mills, 2,500 shops, 72 churches and a mint. The latter made it a target for invasions, several in the 16th century, which resulted in the flight of many of its inhabitants to Damietta. Later the city was taken over by the military and slowly destroyed before it finally succumbed to the elements.

In 1951, Ti-Nis Island's medieval ruins were first registered. The name was originally Greek, composed of two parts: Ti [the] and Ninos [island], although to date no Greek remains have yet been found.

In 1979, excavations revealed the outline of the city for the first time. Since the beginning of 1991, about two acres of its total surface, estimated at 215 acres, have been revealed.

Already the ruins of a textile factory have been found along with spinning wheels, shuttles and even cloth in the form of folded linen sheets. The factory was a large rectangular hall where the weavers worked along the walls. There is an independent water tank in addition to toilets.

"In 1979, we were able to find the house of the governor of the city, Abdel-Aziz Al-Garwi, dating between 197 and 205 of the Hejra calendar (between AD 677 and 785)," said Abbas El-Shennawi, director general of the East Delta monuments, who further explained that this was a period of disagreement between Haroun El-Rashid's sons Al-Amin and Al-Ma'moun, when the governor Abdel-Aziz Al-Garwi rebelled against the caliphate and declared the independence of the region.

"The discovery of a marble panel found inside the house was proof that the house belonged to him," said El-Shennawi. "It is now in the Port Said National Museum and is inscribed with the words: This house belongs to commander Abdel-Aziz Bin Al-Wazir Al-Garwi."

Due to the high concentration of salt in the soil, the area is not expected to yield any manuscripts. "Even coin inscriptions were affaced as a result of the acid," El-Shennawi remarked.

Nevertheless, because the city was historically important, and due to its strategic position in the northeastern Delta, the excavation has already drawn more than passing interest.

"Unveiling the whole city might take several decades because we rely on a team of Egyptian workers and experts from Qena," said El-Shennawi. "They only work for two months a year, between mid-April and mid-June when the rain stops falling, from five in the morning until noon."

A second phase of restoration, removing the discovered relics where considered necessary, and conserving those on site from climatic factors is now being started.

"Eventually the city will be open to visitors, maybe as early as two years from now," said El-Shennawi. It will be made accessible by a road link, and will include a coffee shop, ticket kiosk and a small museum to accommodate its most important pieces.

In fact, plans for its development into a tourist attraction are already being discussed. "The site will become accessible after the inauguration of the new road link which passes near the site," said El-Shennawi.

How to get there: Ti-Nis is about 30 minutes west of Port Said. Fishermen will take visitors across the lake on one of their boats, and will also accompany them on a half-hour walk over the very soft sand of the site.

Operating on a goddess

Last month, a large fragment of the face of Mut was joined to a fine limestone "pair statue" in Luxor temple. **Edwin Brock** describes the event

Goddess Mut's face is being lifted by workers

The long-missing face of the goddess Mut, consort of Amun-Ra — the chief deity of Luxor temple — has been joined to a fine limestone *dyad* or "pair statue" of the gods Amun-Ra and Mut. It was probably fashioned during the reign of Tutankhamun as part of a campaign to restore the traditional religion following the depredations of the Amarna period.

Although the texts on the sculpture are of the ubiquitous Ramses II, Tutankhamun is thought to be the likely sponsor and model for the figures, which bear a resemblance to his facial features. In fact, a companion "pair statue" of the same deities, carved in the same kind of limestone and in the same style (and also carrying the name of Ramses) is located across the aisle at the beginning of the double colonnade of papyrus columns that run from the first court of the temple to the "sun court".

It was the keen eye of Ray Johnson, assistant director of the University of Chicago's Epigraphic Survey in Luxor, that made this restoration feasible. Conservation is an important activity of Chicago House, and it was through his investigations and photographic memory that the link was made connecting the face, formerly stored in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, with the figure in the temple at Luxor. The operation was carried out by a team of conservators.

The actual "face lift" was a long, drawn-out affair. At around 9.30 on the morning of the operation, the face was brought from the local storeroom to the temporary scaffolding surrounding the statue. The involved procedure of wrapping the limestone section of the face for lifting took more than an hour. After this came the lengthy process of carefully raising the fragment into position in order to mark the registration points that would serve as indicators of its ultimate placement on the statue.

The next step involved drilling a hole in the back of the face at a precise angle to accommodate the stainless steel dowel that would hold it in place on the statue.

Two holes for large pins of some sort pierced the face fragment and ran into the broken surface of the statue. Another repair job was done on the nose which must have been so severely damaged that a replacement was set into a large square hole in the centre of the face. Unfortunately, this addition became lost and the gaping empty socket mars the beauty of the statue's features.

Since the ancient dowel holes are part of the evidence of the history of the monument, it was decided not to re-use them in the new installation. A new hole was, therefore, made in the centre of the broken surface of the statue to receive the steel pin which would hold the face in position.

Great care had to be taken that the position and angle of this hole in the statue be correctly reproduced on the face to ensure correct alignment. By early evening the exhausted crew, attended by many of the staff of Chicago House and numerous curious tourists, lifted the face into position with a winch for the final time and restored it to its original place.

As with any major operation, the face was held in place not only by the steel pin but also by several lengths of strapping to keep it stable until the adhesive had a chance to set. The final step was to clean the surface of the face of dirt so that it more closely matches the appearance of the statue.

The figures now grace the entrance to the colonnade in a closer approximation of their ancient glory, with their well-modeled features reflecting those of the figure of Tutankhamun in relief on the wall beside them, where he appears to be presenting them with an offering of incense.

There is hope that other fragments found in Cairo may also be restored to their statues in the future. Detection and restoration may become a trend, in which case many interesting and exciting re-discoveries await us.

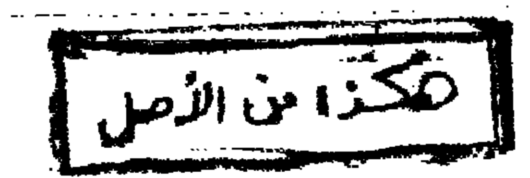






photo: Mohamed Wassim

Ahli's players, Ahmed Felix and Ibrahim Hassan, fighting for the ball against Misri players

Zamalek slides, Ahli rises

A major upset for African Club champs Zamalek and a coveted victory for Ahli in the premier soccer league has intensified the race for the title between the games' two arch-rivals. **Inas Mazhar** reports

It was a 4-2 week. Zamalek football club's 2-4 defeat at the hands of Alexandria's Koroum led to protests from an estimated 2,000 angry fans at the team's Cairo club grounds. Meanwhile, Ahli scored a 4-2 victory over Misri of Port Said, giving their fans double reason to celebrate: the victory brought the team's standing to the top of the league for the first time since the beginning of the competition this season, one point ahead of Zamalek.

With four African titles to its credit since 1984, Zamalek has been a national soccer heavyweight since the inception of the league competition 49 years ago.

Kouroum's standing in the league is fifth from last, just above the relegation zone. Their triumph over Zamalek gave the Alexandrian team its fifth league win this season. Out of a total of 20 league matches, the team lost 10 and drew five.

Following supporters' protests, Zamalek club's board of directors decided to fire coach Mahmoud Saad and replaced him by Mahmoud Abu Regella, a former soccer star and team manager. In addition, four unnamed players were suspended and fined for their poor performances. Yet problems intensified since relations between Abu Regella and the team's Dutch coach Werner were not exactly rosy. The board was unable to mend fences and Abu Regella resigned. Ismail Kolibali, a native of Mali, was given a $150,000 contract to join the team.

Zamalek's loss was its second in the league since it was defeated by Ittihad of Alexandria, 0-1 last month. The club's overall score then was 42 points from 18 matches. They will not play another league match until after the team's second-leg, first-round match next week against Ethiopia's St George in the African Champions' Cup. They won the first match 2-0 in Cairo last week. Before Ahli's victory over Misri, Zamalek was only two points ahead of their arch rival.

Ahli, chasing its second successive league title, entertained 70,000 elated supporters. The momentum of their supporters enthusiasm propelled them to victory in the Misri match. Players from the winning team were awarded LE2,500 bonus each and two days off.

Ahli won six African titles between 1982 and 1993, but has since decided not to compete in the continent's competitions, arguing that travel expenses were too high. Team management expressed a preference for Arab competitions.

Bowl-a-rama in UAE

Lube the fingers, hoist the ball. Egypt's bowlers are set to strike in the UAE Open. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports



Sherine El-Gohary, Egypt's 2nd runner-up in the lane to success *photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid*

With less than two weeks to go until the United Arab Emirates Bowling Open competition begins on 28 March, two Egyptian bowlers, early this week, rose above the competition to earn the right to wear tacky polyester shirts and bowl for Egypt in this up-coming international competition.

*Through an impressive series of strikes and pick-*ups, Riham Hamza and "Yani" emerged from a group of 10 top bowlers in last Saturday's Egypt's final UAE Open qualifications, with respective scores of 187 and 224 points and two tickets to Abu Dhabi courtesy of a bowling equipment company. Joining them will be two runners-up, Sherine El-Gohary and Tarek Helmi.

The ten-pin competition, however, is far from over. And both Hamza and Yani will have their work cut out for them bowling against some of the best bowlers from 78 countries such as the US, Sweden, Norway, four-time world title holder, the Philippines and, of course, the UAE, world-ranked number 15.

"The UAE Bowling Open, which is being held for the first time, will be one of the biggest international tournaments recognised by the International Bowling Federation," explained Khaled Shalaby, one of the organisers for *the Egyptian finals competition*. "The prize money is an impressive $200,000."

Money, next to guzzling beer, or whatever kind of drink deemed culturally acceptable, is probably the only thing that could prompt people to don rented shoes and the flashy team shirts for which bowlers are renowned, while making ludicrous humping gestures in the air after getting a strike. But the Egyptians are not just out for the cash. This competition, which is being held by the UAE as a warm-up for the World Bowling Championship it intends to host in 1999, will be a tre*mendous learning experience for a yet,* relatively inexperienced Egyptian team.

"The UAE Open is only one of several major competitions to which we plan on sending our bowlers in preparation for the World Bowling Cup tournament Egypt will host this November," said Mahmoud El-Etre, another of the qualifiers' organisers. The up-coming competition in Cairo will *be only the second such trial for* Egypt, which debuted last year in the World Cup held in Ireland by fielding a team of Sherine El-Gohary and Ahmed Khattab.

Egypt, however, has a long way to go before it gains on traditionally-strong teams like those of the US and Sweden. To that end, a drive is underway to establish *an Egyptian bowling federation* before the November World Cup in Cairo. Clearly, with the number of professional-calibre Egyptian bowlers now at 180, there is sufficient national interest to drive this push for a bowling federation.

Amr Kamel, a veteran Egyptian bowler and member of the International Bowling Federation, joined by a host of other officials and enthusiasts, has already managed to secure permission from Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Supreme Council for Youth and Sports head, Abdel-Moneim Emara, to launch this federation. What remains to be seen is if it will come into being before the next World Cup.

But, according to Shalaby, even if it doesn't, the important thing is to get it set up in order to properly train a national team. "In terms of representing Egypt in international tournaments or in World Cup competitions, a federation is not necessary," he said. "However, in order to prepare a national team for future world team championships and when bowling makes its Olympic debut in 2004, such a federation will be indispensable."

In the meantime, to better prepare Egyptian bowlers for international competitions, a sponsor company is *committed to sending more bowlers* to such tournaments. After the UAE Open, Egypt will compete in the African Nations Bowling Cup scheduled to be held in May in South Africa. Additionally, a number of other competitions, such as the British Open and the Arab Championships, promise to hone the strike skills of bowlers like El-Gohary and Khattab.

Small and fast gets the gold

She's slight and slender, but as **Eman Abdel-Moeti** finds out, Marwa Elhamy can still knock the stuffing out of you



Marwa Elhamy

It could have been a David and Goliath story. Last week, during the World Tae Kwon Do Championship in Cairo, a diminutive Marwa Elhamy, out-sized but not out-manoeuvred, triumphed over her significantly taller and brawnier Spanish opponent, winning for Egypt its only gold medal of the competition.

Few expected that this moment of celebration would be made possible due to a young woman weighing slightly less than 43 kilograms. It was the men's national tae kwon do team that was expected to punch, block and kick their way into one of the top three slots. They didn't.

Things seldom are what they seem. As the 17-year-old Elhamy entered the ring for the finals of the fin weight-class (under-43kg), many expected that she *would not last long against her Spanish* counterpart. Within seconds, however, it was clear that while she sported a slight build, there was nothing slight about her *ability* to *masterfully blend technique* after technique and kick after kick into one fluid motion.

In contrast, the Spaniard appeared sluggish and inflexible in her execution of the techniques — her long reach becoming more of a hindrance than an asset as her challenger pre-empted her moves with counter-moves.

Elhamy, it seemed to all watching, was using the Korean equivalent of karate's *haragi* (sixth sense) to read her opponent's mind. Two rounds later, a petite, jubilant Egyptian walked off the mat, a 2-1 victory in the bag and a gold medal dangling from her neck.

"I was very surprised by Elhamy's strength, speed and skill," commented Bob Tsan-Tsung, the president of the South Korean delegation to the Cairo championship.

"Her technical abilities are extraordinary," added Fatma Gabr, a member of the women's national team. "While the majority of us are restricted by *our mastery of one or two moves, Marwa* executes all of them with the same degree of excellence and precision."

A glance over her record of past achievements, however, will reveal that this Dervish of the dojo is no stranger to either the sport or success. Since the tender age of seven, she has trained at the Shams Club in Heliopolis, winning every competition she entered in the fin weight-class. Also under her black belt are a string of wins in a series of annual Egypt's Cup competitions, a first place in the 1995 Egypt Open and third place in the 1996 Egypt Open.

When she joined the national team in 1995, Elhamy brought with her a brand of skill rare among many who consider themselves martial artists — the ability to not limit herself to one style.

"I love this martial art and, from the first day I began training, made a commitment to myself that I would do my best to absorb the various styles embraced by my different coaches," she confessed. "From every coach with whom I trained, even if it was just once, I learned something new and different." So, what then is the recipe for success? "I apply *everything* I learned in *my matches*, shifting from one style to another as needed." The recipe, apparently, was just right, allowing her to cook not only the Spaniard's goose, *but also those of her* US, Mexican and Moroccan opponents in preceding matches.

After Boom Boom

NASEEM Hamed will defend his International Boxing Federation (IBF) and World Boxing Organisation (WBO) featherweight titles against European champion, Billy Hardy, at Manchester's Nynex Arena on May 3, promoters have announced.

It will be Hamed's first match since beating IBF champ Tom "Boom Boom" Johnson of the United States in London last month.

Hamed had been expected to pursue the WBA version of the title held by Puerto Rico's Wilfredo Vasquez.

But, instead, 32-year-old Hardy — the WBO's No. 1 contender — was given a third shot at a world title. Hardy has lost two world challenges for the IBF bantamweight title held by Orlando Canizales.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

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Manal Mohieddin:

No mistakes

Think about a harp. Forget the angels in heaven and the cascades of glycerin and honey. The sea lion snaps its teeth

photo: Sherif Sonbol

How did it come about? How do harpists, mostly beautiful women, come about? And who fathered Manal Mohieddin, Cairo's star harpist? Dionysus, Debussy, Liszt or Mohieddin Hussein himself, who looks very much like the charismatic sculptor Brancusi. The family good looks came from the parents, everyone seems a dish in this family.

Seeing Manal Mohieddin behind her harp, she's a mermaid guiding her gold-arched flying sea horse through the waves of richly flowing 19th-century high romantic music. She's tall, a perfect *Elle* model. She dresses always exactly right for any occasion. Even in the rain and dust, grubbing about to get in her car before being trampled under Cairo's feet, she looks right. Without make-up she is really better, simpler, more direct and warm. Made-up for the orchestral fray, she goes to *grande dame* territory, becomes a little distant but remains what she is, a harp legend behind her strings and wires, part of the golden embrace with which the harp surrounds its victims.

The harp is a siren. It has a unique voice known and loved by everyone. It has an irreplaceable position in an orchestra. No one contradicts the harp or its player. Do so, and they are inclined to walk out on any orchestra from Berlin to Los Angeles. They are unique and, worst of all for orchestral societies, they are few. Baroque pearls, they are worth their weight in gold. Violins can drop dead. Harpists, never. They leave a hole in the orchestral web if they are missing. Everyone has favourite harp routines. Entire audiences wait for the harp to thread its way through that certain part of Wagner's *Der Meister Singer*, Act 2. Without it, the entire love scene between two of the major characters is a void, yet it is only a bar or two long for the harp.

Harps give instant life and vitamins to any orchestra. Since hardly anyone can play them, the golden-arched creatures dominate the scene so much they are usually pushed diplomatically to a far side, the left. They hardly ever play with brass or piano, and never with a drum or an organ.

When did the harp come about? Manal, being Egyptian, claims them for the Pharaohs. Pharaonic harps were of all sizes, but mostly enormous. Though physically the modern harp is so photogenic, it is the players who dominate. Harpists can be men, but seldom are. There is something about the playing of it which suites the female body. The waving arms, the gestures, apparently so gentle and the sound of it — surely a female voice. It has glamour, colour and its curves suite the Venus type; Hercules never.

Yet it requires more than a Hercules to play, more than any other instrument. Even a pianist can manage with less strength than a harpist. Manal enjoys spelling out the eccentricities of harps. She tells: "It takes one year to make a harp and 150,000 dollars brings a moderately priced one." Hers is a Japanese harp called a Yohama of this type she bought in Germany when she studied in Frankfurt for two years. The best harps come from America, cost fortunes, there is always a three- to five-year waiting list before you receive one. She says the firm of Line & Helly make the best of all harps. There are five harps in Egypt — two at the Opera ("splendid," she says), and two at the Cairo Conservatoire — and her own harp, housed at the family home on the Saqqara Road.

The harp has 46 strings and seven pedals. It looks angelic, but needs the strength and lasting power of a fiend to master it.

Manal was born in Cairo in 1966 in the family house in Manial. She spent her quite normal, uneventful days there as a child, and then moved to Haraniyya, where the carpets come from. Her father, the artist and ceramist Mohieddin Hussein, sent her to the Conservatoire school, where she began to study the flute and the piano. It was here that her life pattern took a fast step forward, because at the Conservatoire was a harp teacher, Nehad Zikri. Flutes and pianos were out, Zikri said, the harp was in. The instrument of her life was chosen for her at the age of ten. She had never seen the thing called a harp at her childhood lessons, or at the government schools where she was educated. Nehad Zikri took no refusal, opened the door onto a large studio room, thrust the child in and there, in the middle, reared the forbidding golden marine monster with a mouthful of 46 teeth. Manal saw her first harp and burst into a storm of bitter tears. "Knowing me, you can bet they were bitter," says Manal.

Zikri was a great teacher and pedagogue. Also a Draconian general. Manal was hoisted into a regime of unremitting labour and spankings for lassitude if she so much as slowed up on the timetable set out before her. The treatment bore fruit, because after eight months she played in her first concert.

She says now the entire period was "bizarre" because she never thought of refusing to be a harpist, she never noticed any difference between instruments and people. One was as real as the other. So she grew into a harpist almost by accident, without thought. The telling of her life is as laconic as the living of it has become. She has a happy nature. She loves complaining but always with a smile. She is not grumbling about anything, and enjoys her life's work, going straight at things, and never fusses.

"Your day begins at 4.30 in the morning, and you do what you have to do to prepare for a trip to Paris, Frankfurt or Luxor — dresses, make-up, kit, music and the thing, the harp itself in its padded case the size of a motor boat — on and off the plane, with the preparation for the concert, a sore throat or a headache leaving you feeling like a stale piece of bread. What's the fuss?" No way can it all be taken seriously. After a trip Manal Mohieddin arrives cool and orderly, rather pristine and prepared to enjoy herself. Taking it lightly preserves the faculties she says, and the complexion.

She says she never stops — never wants to — loves it all except for smokers. Adores the golden-headed monster who has shaped her life. She is a slave, a hand made for the harp, but it gives her freedom to cope with the musical world. Because of the strange qualities of the harp as an instrument, it requires the same strangeness from the performer. You sit for an hour, as in the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz, before the big moment comes, and all you have are a few lines of harp tone. But the small isolated islands shine out in the performance. It is like waiting at a railway station for the train to come in. In these gaps, do harpists fall asleep waiting? She has not, so far, but the waiting does cause back trouble as the player must remain statue-still. Manal sits like a frozen idol, but her neck kills her, she says, and her fingers stiffen.

In November 1986, she went to Frankfurt after graduating here to begin further studies with a teacher called Busse Lorberth, who spent each summer playing at the Bayreuth Festival. Manal accompanied her and was impressed by this. She says she never saw people working so hard, for so long, for so little — financially. For the other aspect, the Bayreuth experience thrilled her. If you thought of Bayreuth merely as work, it failed, so the festival idea had kept its purity of purpose. It was how one should always work: Wagner, in spite of the high-coloured legend, was really a Buddhist. This began what must have been one of the high times of her young life, and she began to play to larger audiences.

From Frankfurt she went to Wurzburg for two years, a priestess of the golden-headed monster with the steel teeth. In Wurzburg came the big excitement of her life: meeting the French harpist Gizelle Herbert, who had studied in Paris with another great harpist, a male this time, Pierre Jamais. Herbert became her friend, her teacher, her critic and the witness to her life plans, like a sister. She says she owes Herbert her lifestyle. From her she learned to survive the harp's difficulties and demands.

In all the varying styles of harp playing, Italian, German and French, it is the French which is the best. "There are more harpists in France, more cities to play to, more music because French composers have written much for the harp and its needs are more understood," she says. Gizelle Herbert never stops moving or playing, and in France, you do not need to cart the golden angel around on your back, there are plenty of harps. She taught Manal this value of never stopping. The literature for the harp is small, yet its technique is devilish, and the problems of moving it around create a kind of harpist elite.

The beauteous angels who move the sea horse have special problems: Feet have seven pedals to manage, constant changes of key and tone which need ever-moving feet and fingers. It is really harpists who have all the finger problems, because pianos have ivories to protect the human finger. The harp has nothing. The 46 steel girders which give the tone to the instrument cause pain, often intense, because harpist's fingertips are always thin, not fleshy like the pianist's. Pianists have strong, square-tipped fingers — 'manual labour fingers'. Because there is no room to manipulate easily over the strings of the harp, the fingers must be long and thin, but never delicate. Harpists' hands are as steely as the strings, the tips of the fingers are calloused and have corns as tough as those on the toes. They hurt. Harpists can never lay off, if they do, they must endure the hardening process again. If Manal stops for a week, she suffers the softening of the fingers and a new crop of corns must be endured. All for Debussy and Ravel, two composers she loves, who understood the harp.

When Manal finished her work in Wurzburg she could have joined Gizelle Herbert in Paris, which, with Cairo, is her favourite city. She could have gone international. They both agreed that, with Cairo's special qualities of removal from the busier European scene, it might be better for Manal to return home and pluck her strings by the Nile.

Until the '60s, all harpists were foreign. They came, plucked and went home. No one here had ever thought of becoming a harpist before her time, so Manal came home and became the first Egyptian harpist.

She is busy. She accepts anything. With a wave of the arms, Manal says she does supper dates, breakfast dates, seaside dates under palm trees, grand dinner-time five-star dates and starched diplo dates, group tourist dates and pop and crunch dates. Jazz appeals to her, she sways and jerks with the rest of the bands through Hogy Carmichael. She treads the yellow brick road with the Wizard of Oz. Anything goes to keep going and keep the corns away. A pro — the solid steel-fingered pro who plays with her brother Sherif Mohieddin's orchestra, the Akhnaten, in various programmes.

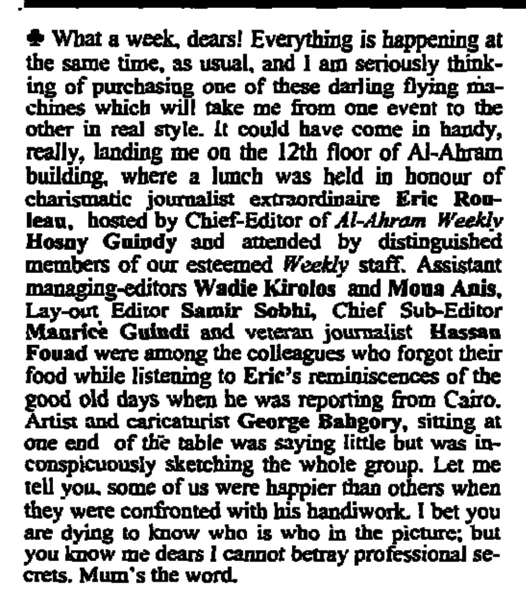
She is elegant, happy. Maybe the same person who, years ago, in a Paris dress bought for her by her father, played Abdel-Rahim's piece *My Kitten*, an Egyptian folk theme. At her debut concert she must already have been a beauty.

Apollo, Sappho, Nero and his mother all played the harp. The instrument as highly strung as a Formula 1 racing car, and needing the accuracy in action of a motor mechanic. Like them, no mistakes, ever, for Manal Mohieddin.

Profile by **David Blake**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris





♣ What a week, dears! Everything is happening at the same time, as usual, and I am seriously thinking of purchasing one of these darling flying machines which will take me from one event to the other in real style. It could have come in handy, really, landing me on the 12th floor of Al-Ahram building, where a lunch was held in honour of charismatic journalist extraordinaire **Eric Rouleau**, hosted by Chief-Editor of *Al-Ahram Weekly* **Hosny Guindy** and attended by distinguished members of our esteemed *Weekly* staff. Assistant managing-editors **Wadie Kirolos** and **Mona Anis**, Lay-out Editor **Samir Sobhi**, Chief Sub-Editor **Maurice Guindi** and veteran journalist **Hassan Fouad** were among the colleagues who forgot their food while listening to **Eric's** reminiscences of the good old days when he was reporting from Cairo. Artist and caricaturist **George Bahgory**, sitting at one end of the table was saying little but was inconspicuously sketching the whole group. Let me tell you, some of us were happier than others when they were confronted with his handiwork. I bet you are dying to know who is who in the picture; but you know me dears I cannot betray professional secrets. Mum's the word.

♦ Practice makes perfect, as you well know, and I have decided to practice the art of attending anniversaries. You may think that this is an easy activity, but let me tell you, it requires a specialist's skills in adorning oneself appropriately, as well as a nostalgic tendency, to truly enjoy those many happy returns. I was precisely in that sort of mood when I stepped into that jewel of architecture — you know how architecturally picky we at the *Weekly* are — the Armenian Embassy, which was celebrating its fifth anniversary of diplomatic relations and welcoming the Armenian minister of foreign affairs, **Alexander Arzoumanian**. On one of the most exclusive streets of Zamalek, behind high walls, a delightful spectacle of bricks and wood joined in harmony awaited me, and it is with great enthusiasm that I congratulated the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia, **Edward Nablandian**, and his lovely wife, on their impeccable choice.







Clockwise: Il Mediterraneo di Bernard de Zogheb; *Egyptian Cooking* by Samia Abdennour; we, at the *Weekly*; Dalia and Walid; the Armenian Embassy

♠ Yesterday evening saw me boarding the express train to Alex, and I must say there were a few raised eyebrows among my fellow passengers, for no one, it seems, dresses up for travel these days. But it was not out of nostalgia for the good old days of the Orient Express that I had on a feather boa fixed with my favourite diamond peacock brooch. I was headed, you see, for the Italian Cultural Centre in Alex for the inauguration of my good friend **Bernard de Zogheb**'s latest exhibition. "Il Mediterraneo di Bernard de Zogheb" — already the title evoked memories, and I whiled away the train journey free-associating about summers past on Grecian isles. Once there, I spotted Bernard — looking positively radiant — among his circle of friends and admirers. And le tout Alexandrie had turned up for the event. It was a long time since I'd seen **Farfalina Piha** and guess what... she was in that purple tafetta number with a big bow on the back! It was such a joy to see **Mme Christina** and take up from where we'd left off last time I was at the Elite. And as for Bernard's exquisite watercolours, they brought back even more memories: there was Rome where I took my god-daughter when she turned 16, Mykonos where I spent my fifth honeymoon and, closer to home, the Banyan in Nouzha Gardens where I often went with my childhood love — many more moons ago than I care to remember.

♣ Our very own **Samia Abdennour** is at it again! Not content with making up weekly brainteasers for all you crossword fans (or addicts, as the case may be), she has produced a mouthwateringly scrumptious array of Egyptian and Middle Eastern recipes, easy to cook and even easier to eat. Enough to set the most hardened dieter's tastebuds tingling! I can still remember the eggplant *pilaf* Samia regaled me with. As for her *sfeeha*, it is unparalleled, especially if you can pronounce it...

♥ Last Thursday, in a fabulous party at the Gezira Sheraton, the beautiful **Dahlia El-Ghamri**, 24, sister of our dear colleague **Khalid El-Ghamri**, got engaged to **Walid Al-Fakahani**, 27, the manager of Diarna Hotel in Dahab, Sinai. Dahlia is the daughter of **Salah El-Ghamri**, chairman of the board of the Kawmiah Distribution Corporation. Distinguished guests like **Mustafa Kamal Helmi**, speaker of the Shura Council, and **Samir Abdel-Razek**, general manager of *Akhbar Al-Yom*, graced the occasion with their presence. **Mustafa Al-Bortaqani**, head of the legal department at Al-Ahram, was also present.

Dahlia is an employee in the advertising section of the International *Al-Ahram*.. The fair-haired and honey-eyed **Walid** leads a very exciting life down in Dahab. **Dahlia**, hopes to put a stop, not to his career, but to the more mischievous aspects of his lifestyle. **Dina**, the voluptuous Cairene dancer, livened up the evening after the sumptuous five-course dinner. After dancing all night long, **Khalid** swears that he only drank sherbet.